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MATTHEW ARNOLD

Merrill's English Texts

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY JULIAN W. ABERNETHY, PH.D., AUTHOR OF
"AMERICAN LITERATURE," "ENGLISH LITER-
ATURE," AND "CORRECT PRONUNCIATION"



NEW YORK
CHARLES E. MERRILL CO.

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Oct. 26. 18.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Merrill's English Texts

THIS series of books will include in complete editions those masterpieces of English Literature that are best adapted for the use of schools and colleges. The editors of the several volumes will be chosen for their special qualifications in connection with the texts to be issued under their individual supervision, but familiarity with the practical needs of the classroom, no less than sound scholarship, will characterize the editing of every book in the series.

In connection with each text, a critical and historical introduction, including a sketch of the life of the author and his relation to the thought of his time, critical opinions of the work in question chosen from the great body of English criticism, and, where possible, a portrait of the author, will be given. Ample explanatory notes of such passages in the text as call for special attention will be supplied, but irrelevant annotation and explanations of the obvious will be rigidly excluded.

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INTRODUCTION

MATTHEW ARNOLD

MATTHEW ARNOLD was the son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the celebrated head-master of Rugby School. He was born December 24, 1822, at Laleham, near Staines. In 1836 he entered Winchester School, but was removed the following year to Rugby, where he completed his preparation for the university. He maintained a high position in the school, presenting in 1840 a prize poem, and winning the same year a scholarship at Balliol College, Oxford. During his first year at the university he obtained the Hertford Scholarship, for proficiency in Latin, and later won the Newdigate Prize for English Poetry, with a poem entitled "Cromwell." He graduated with honors, and in 1845 was elected Fellow of Oriel College, just thirty years after the election of his father to the same honor. Among his colleagues here were R. W. Church, Dean of St. Paul's, John Earle, Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, and the poet A. H. Clough. His intimacy with Clough grew into the closest friendship, which received its final seal in the tender and noble lines of *Thyrsis*, an elegy that for exalted beauty must be placed with Milton's *Lycidas* and Shelley's *Adonais*.

Of his life at Oxford one who knew him in those days says: "His perfect self-possession, the sallies of his ready wit, the humorous turn which he could give to any subject that he handled, his gayety, exuberance, versatility, audacity, and unfailing command of words, made him

one of the most popular and successful undergraduates that Oxford has ever known." Oxford, as the home of his intellectual life, was always dear to him, that "beautiful city, so venerable, so lovely!" who, "by her ineffable charm, keeps ever calling us near to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection." During his residence the university was still under the influence of the famous Tractarian Movement, which did so much to purify English religious thought. The leaders of the movement were Fellows of Oriel, and the year in which Mr. Arnold became Fellow of this college was the year in which Dr. Newman seceded to Rome. The influence of these events may be traced in all his writing and thinking; in apparent contradiction of his radical and analytical habit of thought, he maintained through life a conservative admiration for the Established Church.

From 1847 to 1851 Mr. Arnold acted as private secretary to the late Lord Lansdowne. He married in 1851, and the same year was appointed Lay Inspector of Schools, a position which he held with honor for nearly thirty-five years. Twice he was sent abroad by the government to study the school-systems of the Continent, and his various reports are among the most valuable contributions to educational literature. He labored zealously until the end of his life for the reform of the English public schools, aiming especially at the elevation of middle-class education, to the defects of which he traced the greater part of the moral, social, and political faults of English civilization. To organize middle-class education as well as it is organized in France and Germany was, to his mind, the "one thing necessary" for expelling the "Philistines" and regenerating English society.

Mr. Arnold's first appearance in literature was as a poet, with the now famous little volume of 1848, entitled *The Strayed Reveller, and other Poems*, by A. In 1853 *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* appeared, and soon

after he published in his own name a volume of selections from the two preceding volumes, including a few new poems. The impression produced by his poetry was such that in 1857 he was elected to the Professorship of Poetry at Oxford, a position which he held for two terms, a period of ten years, at the end of which there was general regret that the limitation of the statutes did not permit a third term. During this period *Merope*, a tragedy after the Greek manner, was published, followed by the celebrated *Lectures on Translating Homer*, and, in 1865, by the epoch-making volume of *Essays in Criticism*. This book was a revelation in literature. By it criticism was endowed with a new function; it was elevated to the dignity of a creative art; even poetry was made a "criticism of life." The author defined the new criticism to be "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world," and his whole literary work was an illustration of the definition. Such a form of criticism was far removed from the militant omniscience of the Edinburgh critics, as also from the tea-table civility of the Lamb and Leigh Hunt school. The lesson of this volume was that criticism must be broadened and humanized, that it must be sympathetic, tempered with "sweet reasonableness," and, above all, truthful, endeavoring with sincerity to "see things as in themselves they are." With these essays a new era in critical writing began. England now had her own Sainte-Beuve.

With this view of the true function of criticism it is not strange, perhaps, that Mr. Arnold's attention was often withdrawn from literature and devoted to social and religious questions. In 1870 appeared *Culture and Anarchy*, an essay in political and social criticism, presenting a good illustration of the logical force of that peculiar literary style which in his hands was always an instrument of marvelous delicacy and power. His theo-

logical criticism is contained in *St. Paul and Protestantism*, published in 1871; *Literature and Dogma*, 1873; *God and the Bible*, 1875; and *Last Essays on Church and Religion*, 1877. These books aroused bitter controversy. His earnest effort to rescue the essential elements of the Christian religion from the destruction threatened by dogmatic theology in the one direction and materialistic science in the other was regarded by many as an attack upon Christianity itself.

Mr. Arnold's other published works are: *The Study of Celtic Literature*, 1868; *Friendship's Garland*, 1871; *Mixed Essays* and *Irish Essays*, 1882; *Discourses in America*, 1885; *Complete Poems*, 1876; a volume of *Selected Poems* in the Golden Treasury Series, and a posthumous volume, *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*. A mere enumeration of his books shows the breadth and versatility of his mind. He was poet, essayist, theologian, critic, philosopher; yet a remarkable singleness of purpose runs through all his work. Whatever the topic, the real theme is culture, in its highest sense, — the refinement and harmonious development of the intellect and the soul. His writing is a constant appeal to the ideal in human nature, an insistence upon the moral and spiritual aspects of life in contrast with the vulgar material aspects. As a prose stylist he is one of the great masters. As a poet only two, or three at most, of his contemporaries should be named before him. His poetry is a splendid embodiment of the profoundest thought and feeling of the period, especially of the struggle through which all sensitive souls are passing in the recoil before the "hopeless tangle of this age."

The death of Matthew Arnold occurred suddenly, April 15, 1888, bringing a painful shock to the thousands who had long been accustomed to regard him as a leader and teacher. "Not only the world of literature, but the infinitely larger world of unexpressed thought and feeling

and unembodied imagination, is sensibly the poorer for his loss." His special mission was, as Mr. Stedman expresses it, "that of spiritualizing what he deemed an era of unparalleled materialism." His most earnest desire was to warn all, as he warned his *Scholar-Gypsy*, to fly from

"This strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts."

And although his words of warning have often been "on men's impious uproar hurled," they have left a deep and permanent impress upon the finer consciousness of the age.

CRITICAL OPINIONS

ARNOLD AS A POET

"He is a maker of such exquisite and thoughtful verse that it is hard sometimes to question his title to be considered a genuine poet. On the other hand, it is likely that the very grace and culture and thoughtfulness of his style inspire in many the first doubt of his claim to the name of poet. Where the art is evident and elaborate, we are all too apt to assume that it is all art and not genius. Mr. Arnold is a sort of miniature Goethe; we do not know that his most ardent admirers could demand a higher praise for him, while it is probable that the description will suggest exactly the intellectual peculiarities which lead so many to deny him a place with the really inspired singers of his day." — MCCARTHY'S *History of Our Own Times*.

"Mr. Arnold belongs to the classical school of poetry, regarding the Greeks, with their strength and simplicity of phrase and their perfect sense of form, as his masters.

To the imaginative power of a true poet he adds a delicacy and refinement of taste and a purity and severity of phrase which uncultivated readers often mistake for boldness. Nowhere in his poems do we find those hackneyed commonplaces, decked out with gaudy and ungraceful ornament, which pass for poetry with many people. His fault rather is that he is too exclusively the poet of culture. Many of his verses will always seem flat and insipid to those who have not received a classical education; while, on the other hand, students of Greek literature will be disposed to praise certain of his pieces more highly than their intrinsic merit demands. Yet it may be doubted whether some of his work as a poet will not stand the ordeal of time better than that of any contemporary poet, Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Browning excepted. There are few poems which show such a refined sense of beauty, such dignity and self-restraint, such admirable adaptation of the form to the subject, as Mr. Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, *Tristram and Iseult*, and the *Forsaken Merman*." — NICOLL'S *Landmarks of English Literature*.

"His shorter meters, used as the framework of songs and lyrics, rarely are successful; but through youthful familiarity with the Greek choruses he has caught something of their irregular beauty. *The Strayed Reveler* has much of this unfettered charm. Arnold is restricted in the range of his affections; but that he is one of those who can love very loyally the few with whom they do enter into sympathy, through consonance of traits or experiences, is shown in the emotional poems entitled *Faded Leaves* and *Indifference*, and in later pieces, which display more fluency, *Calais Sands* and *Dover Beach*. A prosaic manner injures many of his lyrics; at least he does not seem clearly to distinguish between the functions of poetry and of prose. He is more at ease in long,

stately, swelling measures, whose graver movement accords with a serious and elevated purpose. Judged as works of art, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead* really are majestic poems. Their blank verse, while independent of Tennyson's, is the result, like that of the *Mort d'Arthur*, of its author's Homeric studies; is somewhat too slow in *Balder Dead*, and fails of the antique simplicity, but is terse, elegant, and always in 'the grand manner.' Upon the whole this is a remarkable production; it stands at the front of all experiments in a field remote as the northern heavens and almost as glacial and clear. . . . *Sohrab and Rustum* is a still finer poem, because more human and more complete in itself. The verse is not so devoid of epic swiftness. The powerful conception of the relations between the two chieftains and the slaying of the son by the father are tragical and heroic." — STEDMAN'S *Victorian Poets*.

THE STORY OF SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

THE material for Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* was taken from the great Persian epic, the *Shah-Namah*, or *Book of Kings*. Firdusi, the author of this celebrated poem, whose real name was Abu'l Casim Mansur, was born about the year 941 A.D. He was learned in all the wisdom of the Persian and Arabic literatures, and was chosen by Mahmud, the sultan of Ghaznin, after a competition with seven other poets, to convert the ancient legends of Persia into a connected poem. At one of the meetings of the court poets he was so successful with an improvised verse that the sultan bestowed upon him the name Firdusi (*Firdus*, paradise), saying: "Thou hast made my court a paradise."

Firdusi labored upon his royal task for thirty years, and wrote sixty thousand verses; for each verse he was to receive a gold piece from the sultan, and it was his

purpose to devote the whole sum to the building of a dike for his native town of Tus. But there were rivals and enemies at court, and instead of the sixty thousand pieces of gold that had been promised, the sultan was persuaded to send him sixty thousand pieces of silver. With righteous indignation Firdusi rejected the gift, sent back a proud message of scorn, wrote a scathing satire against the sultan, and then fled from his dominions. He

“Who loved the ancient kings, and learned to see
Their buried shapes in vision one by one,
And wove their deeds in lovely minstrelsy,
For all the glory that his name had won
To Persia, as in exile by the sea.”

At length, after many years of wandering, he returned to his native town, a decrepit old man. Time and the entreaties of friends had appeased the sultan's anger, and he sought to make amends for the wrong done to the noble poet. The promised gold he now sent to him, with a robe of honor and a message of welcome and good-will. But it was too late: while the camels were bearing the treasure in at one gate of the town, the body of Firdusi was borne out at another. But the great stone dike for the river of Tus was built with the gold, as a monument to the poet's memory.

The *Shah-Namah* is the national epic of Persia, as the *Iliad* is of Greece, the *Nibelungenlied* of Germany, and the *Cid* of Spain. Rustum is a hero like Hercules, Achilles, and Siegrid. The finest episode of the poem is the story of the fatal contest between Rustum and his son. Some of the details of the narrative were changed by Arnold in order to bring it within the requirements of modern poetic art. The original story runs thus:

Rustum was hunting near the borders of Turan, and while he was sleeping, his faithful horse, Ruksh, was stolen by certain young men of Turan. At this Rustum

was sorely troubled. He followed the hoof-prints to the neighboring city of Samengan, and in great wrath demanded of the king of that city that his steed be restored to him, and he vowed that if Ruksh were not restored, many of the sons of Turan should pay for him with their heads. The king calmed his anger with gracious promises of assistance, and conducted him to his palace. And there Rustum was entertained by the beautiful princess Tahmineh, who was already in love with him for his great deeds of heroism of which she had heard much, and who had connived at the stealing of Ruksh in order that she might bring him thither. The conclusion of this adventure was a royal wedding at the court of Samengan. But the wild spirit of Rustum could not be confined at court, and having recovered his horse Ruksh, he departed. At parting he gave to his young bride an amulet of onyx, saying: "Cherish this jewel, and if Heaven cause thee to give birth unto a daughter, fasten it within her locks, and it will shield her from evil; but if it be granted unto thee to bring forth a son, fasten it upon his arm, that he may wear it like his father."

A remarkable son was born and he was called Sohrab; but Tahmineh sent word to Rustum that the child was a girl, for she feared that he would take the boy from her; wherefore Rustum gave no heed to his child. When Sohrab had grown to great strength and courage he demanded the name of his father, and upon learning that the far-famed Rustum was his father he resolved to find him. His mother would have him keep his lofty parentage a secret, for King Afrasiab was the enemy of Rustum, but he boldly proclaimed his birth and his purpose to conquer the kingdom of Iran and place his father upon the throne. And he had also a secret purpose, which was to return with Rustum and conquer the kingdom of Turan for himself.

Now King Afrasiab was much pleased with the young hero, for his heart was at once filled with a crafty purpose. He prepared an army for Sohrab, and called the leaders to him secretly, and said: "Into our hands hath it been given to settle the course of the world. For it is known unto me that Sohrab is sprung from Rustum the Pehliva, but from Rustum must it be hidden who it is that goeth out against him, then peradventure he will perish by the hands of this young lion, and Iran, devoid of Rustum, will fall a prey into my hands. Then will we subdue Sohrab also, and all the world will be ours." So the united Tartar bands set out toward the kingdom of Kai Kaoos, and on the way Sohrab performed mighty deeds of valor, the fame of which was loudly sounded through the land of Iran. The king in terror sent to Rustum, asking him to come forth from his retirement and lead the army against this new conqueror. But Rustum tarried in his coming many days, and when at length he came the king was in great wrath, and threatened to put him to death. Then Rustum answered him with words of scorn: "I am a free man and no slave, and am servant alone unto God; and without Rustum Kai Kaoos is as nothing. But for me, who called forth Kai Kobad, thine eyes had never looked upon this throne. And had I desired it, I could have sat upon its seat. But now am I weary of thy follies, and I will turn me away from Iran, and when this Turk shall have put you under his yoke, I shall not learn thereof." Then he strode proudly from the king's presence, sprang upon Ruksh, and disappeared. And now the nobles and chieftains of Iran were in still greater terror because of this folly of their king, and they went to Rustum and with many prayers prevailed with him to return, and the king humbled himself and craved pardon from Rustum for his words spoken in anger, and bestowed rich gifts upon him. So Rustum prepared himself for the contest.

At length the two armies were face to face by the river Oxus. Sohrab, hoping ever to find Rustum, led Hujir, an Iranian captive, to a height overlooking the enemy's camp, and questioned him about the tents of the leaders; but Hujir answered falsely, and so he believed that Rustum's tent was not among them. He then challenged Kai Kaoos to single combat, and the craven king persuaded Rustum to meet the bold champion. When Rustum saw the youth and noble bearing of Sohrab his heart went out in compassion toward him, and he besought him to retire: "O young man, the air is warm and soft, but the earth is cold." And Sohrab, filled with a sudden and strange hope, said: "Tell me thy name, that my heart may rejoice in thy words, for it seemeth unto me that thou art none other than Rustum, the son of Zal." But Rustum denied that he was Rustum, for he deemed that Sohrab would be the more afraid when he beheld such prowess in an Iranian chieftain; and Sohrab was made sorrowful by his words.

And now the combat began. They fought with spears, with swords, with arrows, and with clubs. They strove until their mail was torn and covered with blood, and their horses spent with exhaustion. Rustum thought within himself that in all his days he had not met such a foe, and finally he was felled by a terrible blow from Sohrab's club. The day being then far spent, the champions rested for the night. Still troubled in mind, Sohrab sought again to know of Haman whether his antagonist might not be Rustum; but Haman, mindful of the command of his master, Afrasiab, replied that he knew the face of Rustum well, for he had often seen him in battle, and this man was not Rustum. On the morrow the champions again met, and again Sohrab urged peace: "For it seemeth unto me that this conflict is impure. And if thou wilt listen to my desires, my heart shall speak to thee of love. And for this cause I ask thee yet

again, tell me thy name, neither hide it any longer, for I behold that thou art of noble race. And it would seem unto me that thou art Rustum, the chosen one, the son of Zal." And Rustum answered: "O hero of tender age, we are not come forth to parley, but to combat, and mine ears are sealed against thy words of lure."

Then they joined battle, and from morning until the setting of the sun they struggled. At last Sohrab seized Rustum by the girdle and threw him to the ground, and would have ended his life had not Rustum, bethinking himself of a wile, cried out to him that in such contests it was the custom in Iran not to slay an adversary until he had been twice overcome. So again they rested. and that night Rustum prayed to his god Ormuzd that the strength of his earlier years might return. And Ormuzd heard his prayer. On the morning of the third day Rustum rushed upon Sohrab with renewed might, seized him with a terrible grasp, hurled him to the earth, so that his back was broken like a reed, and drew forth his sword to sever the body. Then Sohrab in agony cried: "I sped not forth for empty glory, but I went out to seek my father; for my mother had told me by what tokens I should know him, and I perish for longing after him. And now have my pains been fruitless, for it hath not been given unto me to look upon his face. Yet I say unto thee, if thou shouldest become a fish that swimmeth in the depths of the ocean, if thou shouldest change into a star that is concealed in the farthest heaven, my father would draw thee forth from thy hiding-place and avenge my death upon thee when he shall learn that the earth is become my bed. For my father is Rustum the Pehliva, and it shall be told unto him how that Sohrab, his son, perished in the quest after his face." At these words Rustum fell to the earth as if stricken by a blow, and he demanded of Sohrab some token of Rustum. Then Sohrab charged him to open his armor, and there

he saw the amulet of onyx upon his arm; and when he had seen it he cried out in terrible agony of soul. Then Sohrab asked that the army of Turan be permitted to return in peace. "As for me," he said, "I came like the thunder and I vanish like the wind, but perchance it is given unto us to meet again above." And then the spirit of Sohrab departed.

Now that Sohrab was dead, Rustum burned his tent, his throne, and all his arms and trappings of war. And he cried aloud continually, "I that am old have killed my son. My heart is sick unto death." The body of his son he bore to Seistan, and placed it in a noble tomb. And joy never again entered into the heart of Rustum. The heavy news was carried to the court of Samengan, and the old king tore his garments. And when Tahmineh knew that her son Sohrab was dead, she was beside herself with grief. She sent for his steed and his armor, and she stroked the steed, pressing his head to her breast and pouring her tears upon him. And the helmet that Sohrab had worn she kissed many times, and his gold and jewels she gave to the poor. A year she mourned, and then, borne down to death by her sorrow, her spirit departed to her son.

NOTE. There is no complete translation of the *Shah-Namah* in English. The standard version is the French version of Jules Mohl, published by Madame Mohl in 1876. There is an English version by Mr. James Atkinson, giving an epitome of the poem from a Persian abridgment. Portions of the poem will be found in Mr. Robinson's *Persian Poetry for English Readers*, and in Miss Zimmern's *Heroic Tales from Firdusi the Persian*. This adaptation has been drawn upon for the foregoing narrative. The study of Firdusi's exile has been told in pleasing verse by Edmund W. Gosse in his *Firdusi in Exile*.

aside the
inter the

pen head
stroke

initial

2

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

AN EPISODE

AND ¹ the first gray of morning filled the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus ² stream.
But all the Tartar camp along the stream
Was hushed, and still the men were plunged in
sleep;

Sohrab ³ alone, he slept not; all night long
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed;
But when the gray dawn stole into his tent,
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,
And took his horseman's cloak, and left his tent,
And ⁴ went abroad into the cold wet fog,
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's ⁵ tent.

Through the black Tartar tents he passed, which
stood

Clustering like beehives on the low flat strand
Of Oxus, where the summer floods o'erflow

When the sun melts the snow in high Pamere; ⁶
Through the black tents he passed, o'er that low
strand,

And to a hillock came, a little back
From the stream's brink — the spot where first a
boat,

Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.

The men of former times had crowned the top
With a clay fort; but that was fall'n, and now

The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.

And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood

Upon the thick piled carpets in the tent,

And found the old man sleeping on his bed
Of rugs and felts, and near him lay his arms.

And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step
Was dulled; for he slept light,¹ an old man's sleep;

And he rose quickly on one arm, and said: —

“Who art thou? for it is not yet clear dawn.
Speak! is there news, or any night alarm?”

But Sohrab came to the bedside, and said:

“Thou know'st me, Peran-Wisa! it is I.

The sun is not yet risen, and the foe
Sleep; but I sleep not; all night long I lie
Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.

For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek

Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,

40 In Samarcand,¹ before the army marched;
And I will tell thee what my heart desires.
Thou know'st if, since from Ader-baijan ² first
I came among the Tartars and bore arms,
I have still served Afrasiab well, and shown,
At my boy's years, the courage of a man.
This too thou know'st, that while I still bear on
The conquering Tartar ensigns through the world,
And beat the Persians back on every field,
I seek ³ one man, one man, and one alone —
Rustum,⁴ my father; who I hoped should greet,
Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field,
His not unworthy, not inglorious son.
So I long hoped, but him I never find.
Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.
Let the two armies rest to-day; but I
Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords
To meet me, man to man; if I prevail,
Rustum will surely hear it; if I fall —
Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.
Dim is the rumor of a common fight,⁵
Where host meets host, and many names are sunk;
But of a single combat fame speaks clear."

He spoke; and Peran-Wisa took the hand

Of the young man in his, and sighed, and said:

“O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine!

Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,

And share the battle's common chance with us

Who love thee, but must press forever first,

In single fight incurring single risk,

To find a father thou hast never seen?

That were far best, my son, to stay with us

Unmurmuring; in our tents, while it is war,

And when 'tis truce, then in Afrasiab's towns.

But, if this one desire indeed rules all,

To seek out Rustum — seek him not through fight!

Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,

O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son!

But far hence seek him, for he is not here.

For now it is not as when I was young,

When Rustum was in front of every fray;

But now he keeps apart, and sits at home,

In Seistan,¹ with Zal,² his father old.

Whether that ³ his own mighty strength at last

Feels the abhorred approaches of old age,

Or in some quarrel with the Persian King.

There go! — thou wilt not? Yet my heart fore-

bodes

Danger or death awaits thee on this field.

Fain would I know thee safe and well, though
lost

To us; fain therefore send thee hence, in peace

To seek thy father, not seek single fights

In vain; — but who can keep the lion's cub

From ravening, ¹ and who govern Rustum's son?

Go, I will grant thee what thy heart desires."

So said he, and dropped Sohrab's hand, and left

His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay;

And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat

He passed, and tied his sandals on his feet,

And threw a white cloak round him, and he took

In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword;

And on his head he set his sheepskin cap,

Black, glossy, curled, the fleece of Kara-Kul; ²

And raised the curtain of his tent, and called

His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun by this had risen, and cleared the fog

From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands.

And from their tents the Tartar horsemen filed

Into the open plain; so Haman ³ bade —

Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa ruled

The host, and still was in his lusty prime.

110 From their black tents, long files of horse, they
streamed;

As when some gray November morn the files,
In marching order spread, of long-necked cranes
Stream over Casbin ¹ and the southern slopes
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,
Or some frore ² Caspian reed-bed, southward bound
For the warm Persian seaboard — so they streamed.
The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,
First, with black sheepskin caps and with long
spears;

Large men, large steeds; who from Bokhara come
And Khiva,³ and ferment the milk of mares.⁴

Next, the more temperate Toorkmuns ⁵ of the south,
The Tukas, and the lances of Salore,
And those from Attruck ⁶ and the Caspian sands;
Light men and on light steeds, who only drink
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.

And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came
From far, and a more doubtful service owned; ⁷

The tartars of Ferghana,⁸ from the banks
Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards
And close-set skullcaps; and those wilder hordes
Who roam o'er Kipchak ⁹ and the northern waste.

Kalmucks¹ and unkempt Kuzzaks,² tribes who
stray

Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,³

Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere;

These all filed out from camp into the plain.

And on the other side the Persians formed;—

First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seemed,

The Ilyats of Khorassan; ⁴ and behind,

The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,

Marshaled battalions bright in burnished steel.

But Peran-Wisa with his herald came,

Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,

And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.

And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw

That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back,

He took his spear, and to the front he came,

And checked his ranks, and fixed them where they
stood.

And the old Tartar came upon the sand

Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said:

“Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear!

Let there be truce between the hosts to-day.

But choose a champion from the Persian lords

To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man.”

As, in the country, on a morn in June,
When the dew glistens on the pearled ears,
A shiver runs through the deep corn ¹ for joy —
So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,
A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they loved.

But as a troop of peddlers, from Cabool,²
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,³
That vast sky-neighboring mountain of milk snow;
Crossing so high, that, as they mount, they pass
Long flocks of traveling birds dead on the snow,
Choked by the air,⁴ and scarce can they themselves
Slake their parched throats with sugared mul-
berries —

In single file they move, and stop their breath,
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging
snows —

So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

And to Ferood his brother chiefs came up
To counsel; Gudurz and Zoarrah came,
And Feraburz,⁵ who ruled the Persian host
Second, and was the uncle of the King;
These came and counseled, and then Gudurz said:
“Ferood, shame bids us take their challenge up,

Yet champion have we none to match this youth.
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.

But Rustum came last night; aloof he sits
And sullen, and has pitched his tents apart.

180 Him will I seek, and carry to his ear
The Tartar challenge, and this young man's name.
Haply he will forget his wrath, and fight.
Stand forth the while, and take their challenge up."

So spake he; and Ferood stood forth and cried:
"Old man, be it agreed as thou hast said!
Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man."

He spake: and Peran-Wisa turned, and strode
Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.
But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,
190 And crossed the camp which lay behind, and
reached,

Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum's tents.
Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,
Just pitched; the high pavilion in the midst
Was Rustum's, and his men lay camped around.
And Gudurz entered Rustum's tent, and found
Rustum; his morning meal was done, but still
The table stood before him, charged with food —
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,

And dark-green melons; and there Rustum sate ¹
Listless, and held a falcon ² on his wrist,
And played with it; but Gudurz came and stood
Before him; and he looked, and saw him stand,
And with a cry sprang up and dropped the bird,
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said: ³

“Welcome! these eyes could see no better sight.
What news? but sit down first, and eat and drink.”

But Gudurz stood in the tent door, and said:
“Not now! a time will come to eat and drink,
But not to-day; to-day has other needs.
The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze;
For from the Tartars is a challenge brought
To pick a champion from the Persian lords
To fight their champion — and thou know’st his
name —

Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.
O Rustum, like thy might is this young man’s!
He has the wild stag’s foot, the lion’s heart;
And he is young, and Iran’s chiefs ⁴ are old,
Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose!”

He spoke; but Rustum answered with a smile:
“Go to! ⁵ if Iran’s chiefs are old, then I

Am older; if the young are weak, the King
Errs strangely; for the King, for Kai Khosroo,¹
Himself is young, and honors younger men,
And lets the aged molder to their graves.
Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young —
The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.
For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame?
For would that I myself had such a son,
And not that one slight helpless girl² I have —
A son so famed, so brave, to send to war,
And I to tarry with the snow-haired Zal,³
My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,
And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,
And he has none to guard his weak old age.
There would I go, and hang my armor up,
And with my great name fence that weak old man,
And spend the goodly treasures I have got,
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,
And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings,
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword no
more."

He spoke, and smiled; and Gudurz made reply.
"What then, O Rustum, will men say to this,
When Sohrab dares our bravest forth, and seeks

Thee most of all, and thou, whom most he seeks,
Hidest thy face? Take heed lest men should say:
‘Like some old miser, Rustum hoards his fame,
And shuns to peril it with younger men.’”

And, greatly moved, then Rustum made reply:
“O Gudurz, wherefore dost thou say such words?
Thou knowest better words than this to say.
What is one more, one less, obscure or famed,
Valiant or craven, young or old to me?
Are not they mortal, am not I myself?
But who for men of naught would do great deeds?
Come, thou shalt see how Rustum hoards his fame!
But I will fight unknown, and in plain arms;
Let not men say of Rustum, he was matched
In single fight with any mortal man.”

He spoke, and frowned; and Gudurz turned, and
ran

Back quickly through the camp in fear and joy —
Fear at his wrath, but joy that Rustum came.
But Rustum strode to his tent door, and called
His followers in, and bade them bring his arms,
And clad himself in steel; the arms he chose
Were plain, and on his shield was no device,
Only his helm was rich, inlaid with gold,

And, from the fluted spine atop, a plume
Of horsehair waved, a scarlet horsehair plume.
So armed, he issued forth; and Ruksh,¹ his horse,
Followed him like a faithful hound at heel —
Ruksh, whose renown was noised through all the
earth,

The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once
Did in Bokhara by the river find
A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home,
And reared him; a bright bay, with lofty crest,
Dight² with a saddlecloth of broidered green
Crusted with gold, and on the ground were worked
All beasts of chase, all beasts which hunters know.
So followed, Rustum left his tents, and crossed
The camp, and to the Persian host appeared.
And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts
Hailed; but the Tartars knew not who he was.
And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein,³ in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale⁴ of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands —
So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came.

And Rustum to the Persian front advanced,
And Sohrab armed in Haman's tent, and came.
And as afield the reapers cut a swath
Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,
And on each side are squares of standing corn,
And in the midst a stubble, short and bare —
So on each side were squares of men, with spears
Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.
And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast
His eyes toward the Tartar tents, and saw
Sohrab come forth, and eyed him as he came.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
Who with numb blackened fingers makes her fire —
At cockerow, on a starlit winter's morn,
When the frost flowers the whitened window-
panes —

And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustum eyed
The unknown adventurous youth, who from afar
Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth
All the most valiant chiefs; long he perused
His spirited air, and wondered who he was.
For very young he seemed, tenderly reared;

Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and
straight,

Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound —
So slender Sohrab seemed, so softly reared.

And a deep pity entered Rustum's soul
As he beheld him coming; and he stood,
And beckoned to him with his hand, and said:

“O thou young man, the air of heaven is soft,
And warm, and pleasant; but the grave is cold!
Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.
Behold me! I am vast, and clad in iron,
And tried;¹ and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe —
Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.²

O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death?
Be governed! quit the Tartar host, and come
To Iran, and be as my son to me,
And fight beneath my banner till I die!
There are no youths in Iran brave as thou.”

So he spake, mildly; Sohrab heard his voice,
The mighty voice of Rustum, and he saw
His giant figure planted on the sand,

Sole, like some single tower, which a chief
Hath builded on the waste in former years
Against the robbers; and he saw that head,
Streaked with its first gray hairs; — hope filled
his soul,

And he ran forward and embraced his knees,
And clasped his hand within his own, and said:

“Oh, by thy father’s head! by thine own soul!
Art thou not Rustum? speak! art thou not he?”

But Rustum eyed askance the kneeling youth,
And turned away, and spake to his own soul:

“Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean!
False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.

For if I now confess this thing he asks,

And hide it not, but say: ‘Rustum is here!’

He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes,

But he will find some pretext not to fight,

And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,

A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.

And on a feast-tide, in Afrasiab’s hall,

In Samarcand, he will arise and cry:

‘I challenged once, when the two armies camped

Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords

To cope with me in single fight; but they

36 Shrank, only Rustum dared; then he and I
Changed gifts, and went on equal terms away.
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud;
Then were ¹ the chiefs of Iran shamed through me."

And then he turned, and sternly spake aloud:
"Rise! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus
Of Rustum? I am here, whom thou hast called
By challenge forth; make good thy vaunt or yield!
Is it with Rustum only thou wouldst fight?
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee!
37 For well I know, that did great Rustum stand
Before thy face this day, and were revealed,
There would be then no talk of fighting more.
But being what I am, I tell thee this —
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul:
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt and yield,
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer floods,
Oxus in summer wash them all away."

He spoke; and Sohrab answered, on his feet:
38 "Art thou so fierce? Thou wilt not fright me so!
I am no girl, to be made pale by words.
Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.

But Rustum is far hence, and we stand here.
Begin! thou art more vast, more dread ¹ than I,
And thou art proved, I know, and I am young,
But yet success sways with the breath of heaven.
And though thou thinkest that thou knowest sure
Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.

For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
And whether it will heave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,
Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
We know not, and no search will make us know;
Only the event will teach us in its hour."

He spoke, and Rustum answered not, but hurled
His spear; down from the shoulder, down it came,
As on some partridge in the corn a hawk,
That long has towered in the airy clouds,
Drops like a plummet; Sohrab saw it come,
And sprang aside, quick as a flash; the spear
Hissed, and went quivering down into the sand,
Which it sent flying wide; — then Sohrab threw
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield; sharp
rang,

The iron plates rang sharp, but turned the spear.
And Rustum seized his club, which none but he
Could wield; an unlopped ¹ trunk it was, and huge,
Still rough — like those which men in treeless
 plains

To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,
Hyphasis ² or Hydaspes, when, high up
By their dark springs,³ the wind in winter time
Hath made in Himalayan forests wrack,⁴
And strewn the channels with torn boughs — so
 huge

The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck
One stroke; but again Sohrab sprang aside,
Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came
Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's
 hand.

And Rustum followed his own blow, and fell
To his knees, and with his fingers clutched the
 sand;

And now might Sohrab have unsheathed his sword,
And pierced the mighty Rustum while he lay
Dizzy, and on his knees, and choked with sand;
But he looked on, and smiled, nor bared his sword,
But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said:

“Thou strik’st too hard! that club of thine will
float

Upon the summer floods, and not my bones.

But rise, and be not wroth! not wroth am I;

No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul,

Thou say’st, thou art not Rustum; be it so

Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul.

Boy as I am, I have seen battles too!—

Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,

And heard their hollow roar of dying men;

But never was my heart thus touched before.

Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the
heart?

O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven!

Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,

And make a truce, and sit upon this sand,

And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,

And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum’s deeds.

There are enough foes in the Persian host,

Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang;

Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou

Mayst fight; fight *them*, when they confront thy
spear!

But oh, let there be peace ’twixt thee and me!”

He ceased, but while he spake, Rustum had risen,
And stood erect, trembling with rage; his club
He left to lie, but had regained his spear,
Whose fiery point now in his mailed right hand
Blazed bright and baleful, like that autumn star,¹
The baleful sign of fevers; dust had soiled
His stately crest, and dimmed his glittering arms.
His breast heaved, his lips foamed, and twice his
voice

Was choked with rage; at last these words broke
way:

“Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curled minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!
Fight, let me hear thy hateful voice no more!
Thou art not in Afrasiab’s gardens now
With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to
dance;
But on the Oxus sands, and in the dance
Of battle, and with me, who make no play
Of war; I fight it out, and hand to hand.
Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine!
Remember all thy valor; try thy feints
And cunning! all the pity I had is gone;
Because thou hast shamed me before both the hosts

With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's
wiles."

478 He spoke, and Sohrab kindled at his taunts,
And he too drew his sword; at once they rushed
Together, as two eagles on one prey
Come rushing down together from the clouds,
One from the east, one from the west; their shields
Dashed with a clang together, and a din
Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters
Make often in the forest's heart at morn,
Of hewing axes, crashing trees — such blows
Rustum and Sohrab on each other hailed.
And you would say that sun and stars took part
In that unnatural ¹ conflict; for a cloud
Grew suddenly in heaven, and darked the sun
Over the fighters' heads; and a wind rose
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapped the pair.
In gloom they twain were wrapped, and they
alone;
For both the on-looking hosts on either hand
Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,
And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.
But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot eyes

And laboring breath; first Rustum struck the
shield

Which Sohrab held stiff out; the steel-spiked spear
Rent the tough plates, but failed to reach the skin,
And Rustum plucked it back with angry groan.

Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's helm,
Nor clove its steel quite through; but all the crest
He shore ¹ away, and that proud horsehair plume,
Never till now defiled, sank to the dust;

And Rustum bowed his head; but then the gloom
Grew blacker, thunder rumbled in the air,
And lightnings rent the cloud; and Ruksh, the
horse,

Who stood at hand, uttered a dreadful cry; —

No horse's cry was that, most like the roar

Of some pained desert lion, who all day

Hath trailed the hunter's javelin in his side,

And comes at night to die upon the sand.

The two hosts heard that cry, and quaked for fear,

And Oxus curdled as it crossed his stream.

But Sohrab heard, and quailed not, but rushed on,

And struck again; and again Rustum bowed

His head; but this time all the blade, like glass,

Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,

And in the hand the hilt remained alone.

Then Rustum raised his head; his dreadful eyes
Glared, and he shook on high his menacing spear,
And shouted: "Rustum!" — Sohrab heard that
shout,

And shrank amazed: back he recoiled one step,
And scanned with blinking eyes the advancing
form;

And then he stood bewildered; and he dropped
His covering shield, and the spear pierced his side.
He reeled, and, staggering back, sank to the ground;
And then the gloom dispersed, and ¹ the wind fell,
And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all
The cloud; and the two armies saw the pair —
Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet,
And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began:
"Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill
A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,
And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab's tent;
Or else that the great Rustum would come down
Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move
His heart to take a gift, and let thee go;
And then that all the Tartar host would praise

Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame,
To glad thy father in his weak old age.

Fool, thou art slain, and by an unknown man!
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old."

And, with a fearless mien, Sohrab replied:
"Unknown thou art; yet thy fierce vaunt is vain.
Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man!
No! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.
For were I matched with ten such men as thee,
And I were that which till to-day I was,
They should be lying here, I standing there.
But that belovéd name unnerved my arm —
That name, and something, I confess, in thee,
Which troubles all my heart, and made my shield
Fall; and thy spear transfixed an unarmed foe.
And now thou boastest, and insult'st my fate.
But hear thou this, fierce man, tremble to hear:
The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death!
My father, whom I seek through all the world,
He shall avenge my death, and punish thee!"

As when some hunter in the spring hath found
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill lake,

And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,
And followed her to find her where she fell
Far off; — anon her mate comes winging back
From hunting, and a great way off descries
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks
His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
A heap of fluttering feathers — never more
Shall the lake glass her,¹ flying over it;
Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by —
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But, with a cold incredulous voice he said:
“What prate is this of fathers and revenge?
The mighty Rustum never had a son.”

And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied:
“Ah yes, he had! and that lost son am I.
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,
Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,

Somewhere, I know not where, but far from here;
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee.
Fierce man, bethink thee, for an only son!
What will that grief, what will that vengeance be?
Oh, could I live till I that grief had seen!
Yet him I pity not so much, but her,
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells
With that old king, her father, who grows gray
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.
Her most I pity, who no more will see
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,
With spoils and honor, when the war is done.
But a dark rumor will be bruited up,¹
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear;
And then will that defenseless woman learn
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more,
But that in battle with a nameless foe,
By the far-distant Oxus, he is slain."

He spoke; and as he ceased, he wept aloud,
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.
He spoke; but Rustum listened, plunged in thought.
Nor did he yet believe it was his son
Who spoke, although he called back names he knew;

For he had had sure tidings that the babe,
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all —
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear
Rustum should seek the boy, to train in arms.
And so he deemed that either Sohrab took,
By a false boast, the style ¹ of Rustum's son;
Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.
So deemed he: yet he listened, plunged in thought;
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore
At the full moon; tears gathered in his eyes;
For he remembered his own early youth,
And all its bounding rapture; as, at dawn,
The shepherd from his mountain lodge describes
A far, bright city, smitten ² by the sun,
Through many rolling clouds — so Rustum saw
His youth; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom;
And that old king,³ her father, who loved well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer time —
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills

In Ader-baijan. And he saw that youth,
Of age and looks to be ¹ his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
Of an unskillful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grassplots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass — so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.

And Rustum gazed on him with grief, and said:

“O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have
loved!

Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men
Have told thee false — thou art not Rustum's son
For Rustum had no son; one child he had —
But one — a girl; who with her mother now
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us —
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.”

But Sohrab answered him in wrath; for now
The anguish of the deep-fixed spear grew fierce,
And he desired to draw forth the steel,
And let the blood flow free, and so to die —
But first he would convince his stubborn foe;

And, rising sternly on one arm, he said:

“Man, who art thou who dost deny my words?
Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,
And falsehood, while I lived, was far from mine.
I tell thee, pricked upon this arm I bear
The seal ¹ which Rustum to my mother gave,
That she might prick it on the babe she bore.”

He spoke; and all the blood left Rustum's cheeks,
And his knees tottered, and he smote his hand
Against his breast, his heavily mailed hand,
That ² the hard iron corselet clanked aloud;
And to his heart he pressed the other hand,
And in a hollow voice he spake, and said:

“Sohrab, that were a proof which could not lie!
If thou show this, then art thou Rustum's son.”

Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loosed
His belt, and near the shoulder bared his arm,
And showed a sign in faint vermilion points
Pricked; as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
An emperor's gift — at early morn he paints,
And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands —
So delicately pricked the sign appeared

On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.
It was that griffin,¹ which of old reared Zal,
Rustum's great father, whom they left to die,
A helpless babe, among the mountain rocks;
Him that kind creature found and reared, and
loved —

Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.
And Sohrab bared that image on his arm,
And himself scanned it long with mournful eyes,
And then he touched it with his hand, and said:

“How say'st thou? Is that sign the proper sign
Of Rustum's son, or of some other man's?”

He spoke; but Rustum gazed, and gazed, and
stood

Speechless; and then he uttered one sharp cry:
“O boy — thy father!” — and his voice choked
there.

And then a dark cloud passed before his eyes,
And his head swam, and he sank down to earth.
But Sohrab crawled to where he lay, and cast
His arms about his neck, and kissed his lips,
And with fond faltering fingers stroked his cheeks,
Trying to call him back to life; and life
Came back to Rustum, and he oped his eyes,

And they stood wide with horror; and he seized
In both his hands the dust which lay around,
And threw it on his head, and smirched his hair, —
His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms;
And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,
And his sobs choked him; and he clutched his
sword,

To draw it, and forever let life out.

But Sohrab saw his thought, and held his hands,
And with a soothing voice he spake, and said:

“Father, forbear! for I but meet to-day
The doom which at my birth was written down
In heaven, and thou art heaven’s unconscious
hand.

Surely my heart cried out that it was thou,
When first I saw thee; and thy heart spoke too,
I know it! but fate trod those promptings down
Under its iron heel; fate, fate engaged
The strife, and hurled me on my father’s spear.
But let us speak no more of this! I find
My father; let me feel that I have found!
Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take
My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,
And wash them with thy tears, and say: ‘My son!’

Quick! quick! for numbered are my sands of life,
And swift; for like the lightning to this field
I came, and like the wind I go away —
Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.
But it was writ in heaven that this should be.”

So said he, and his voice released the heart
Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth; he cast
His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,
And kissed him. And awe fell on both the hosts,
When they saw Rustum's grief; and Ruksh, the
horse,

With his head bowing to the ground and mane
Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe
First to the one then to the other moved
His head, as if inquiring what their grief
Might mean; and from his dark, compassionate
eyes

The big warm tears rolled down, and caked the
sand.

But Rustum chid him with stern voice, and said:

“Ruksh, now thou grieveest; but, O Ruksh, thy
feet

Should first have rotted on their nimble joints,
Or ere they brought thy master to this field!”

But Sohrab looked upon the horse, and said:
“Is this, then, Ruksh? How often, in past days,
My mother told me of thee, thou brave steed,
My terrible father’s terrible horse! and said,
That I should one day find thy lord and thee.
Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane!
O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I;
For thou hast gone where I shall never go,
And snuffed the breezes of my father’s home.
And thou hast trod the sand of Seistan,
And seen the River of Helmund,¹ and the Lake
Of Zirrah; and the aged Zal himself
Has often stroked thy neck, and given thee food,
Corn in a golden platter soaked with wine,
And said: ‘O Ruksh! bear Rustum well,’ — but I
Have never known my grandsire’s furrowed face,
Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,
Nor slaked my thirst at the clear Helmund stream;
But lodged among my father’s foes, and seen
Afrasiab’s cities only, Samarcand,
Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,
And the black Toorkmun tents; and only drunk
The desert rivers, Moorghab² and Tejend,
Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,

The northern Sir;¹ and this great Oxus stream,
The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die.”

Then, with a heavy groan, Rustum bewailed:
“Oh, that its waves were flowing over me!
Oh, that I saw its grains of yellow silt²
Roll tumbling in the current o’er my head!”

But, with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied:
“Desire not that, my father! thou must live.
For some are born to do great deeds, and live,
As some are born to be obscured, and die.
Do thou the deeds I die too young to do,
And reap a second glory in thine age;
Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.
But come! thou seest this great host of men
Which follow me; I pray thee, slay not these!
Let me entreat for them; what have they done?
They followed me, my hope, my fame, my star.
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
But me thou must bear hence, not send with them,
But carry me with thee to Seistan,
And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,
Thou, and the snow-haired Zal, and all thy friends.
And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above my bones,

And plant a far-seen pillar over all.
That so the passing horseman on the waste
May see my tomb a great way off, and cry:
‘Sohrab, the mighty Rustum’s son, lies there,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill!’
And I be not forgotten in my grave.”

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied:
“Fear not! as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,
So shall it be; for I will burn my tents,
And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,
And carry thee away to Seistan,
And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee,
With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.
And I will lay thee in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above thy bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all,
And men shall not forget thee in thy grave.
And I will spare thy host; yea, let them go!
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace!
What should I do with slaying any more?
For would that all that I have ever slain
Might be once more alive; my bitterest foes,
And they who were called champions in their time,
And through whose death I won that fame I have—

And I were nothing but a common man,
A poor, mean soldier, and without renown,
So thou mightest live too, my son, my son!
Or rather would that I, even I myself,
Might now be lying on this bloody sand,
Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,
Not thou of mine! and I might die, not thou;
And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan;
And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine;
And say: 'O son, I weep thee not too sore,
For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end!'
But now in blood and battles was my youth,
And full of blood and battles is my age,
And I shall never end this life of blood."

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied:
"A life of blood indeed, thou dreadful man!
But thou shalt yet have peace; only not now,
Not yet! but thou shalt have it on that day
When thou shalt sail in a high-masted ship,
Thou and the other peers of Kai Khosroo,
Returning home over the salt blue sea,
From laying thy dear master in his grave."

And Rustum gazed in Sohrab's face, and said:
"Soon be that day, my son, and deep that sea!

Till then, if fate so wills, let me endure.”

He spoke; and Sohrab smiled on him, and took
The spear, and drew it from his side, and eased
His wound’s imperious anguish; but the blood
Came welling from the open gash, and life
Flowed with the stream; — all down his cold white
side

The crimson torrent ran, dim now and soiled,
Like the soiled tissue of white violets
Left, freshly gathered, on their native bank,
By children whom their nurses call with haste
Indoors from the sun’s eye; his head drooped low,
His limbs grew slack; motionless, white, he lay —
White, with eyes closed; only when heavy gasps,
Deep heavy gasps quivering through all his frame,
Convulsed him back to life, he opened them,
And fixed them feebly on his father’s face;
Till now all strength was ebbd, and from his
limbs

Unwillingly the spirit fled away,
Regretting the warm mansion which it left,
And youth, and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead;
And the great Rustum drew his horseman’s cloak

Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.

As those black granite pillars, once high-reared
By Jemshid ¹ in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now 'mid their broken flights of steps
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side —
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.

And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darkened all; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,
As of a great assembly loosed, and fires
Began to twinkle through the fog; for now
Both armies moved to camp, and took their meal;
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward, the Tartars by the river marge;
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic river floated on,²
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
Rejoicing, through the hushed Chorasmian waste,
Under the soiltary moon; — he flowed
Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,³
Brimming, and bright, and large; then sands begin

To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents; that for many a league
The shorn and parceled Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles —
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain cradle in Pamere,
A foiled circuitous wanderer — till at last
The longed-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed
stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

COME, dear children, let us away;
Down and away below!
Now my brothers call from the bay,
Now the great winds shoreward blow,
Now the salt tides seaward flow;
Now the wild white horses¹ play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.
Children dear, let us away!
This way, this way!

Call her once before you go, —
Call once yet!
In a voice that she will know, —
“Margaret! Margaret!”
Children’s voices should be dear
(Call once more) to a mother’s ear;
Children’s voices, wild with pain, —
Surely she will come again!
Call her once, and come away;
This way, this way!

“Mother dear, we cannot stay!
The wild white horses foam and fret.”
Margaret! Margaret!

Come, dear children, come away down:
Call no more!
One last look at the white-walled town,
And the little gray church on the windy
shore;
Then come down!
She will not come, though you call all day;
Come away, come away!

Children dear, was it yesterday
We heard the sweet bells over the bay, —
In the caverns where we lay,
Through the surf and through the swell,
The far-off sound of a silver bell?
Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground;

Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
Dry their mail and bask in the brine;
Where great whales come sailing by,
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye?
When did music come this way?
Children dear, was it yesterday?

Children dear, was it yesterday
(Call yet once) that she went away?
Once she sate with you and me,
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,
And the youngest sate on her knee.
She combed its bright hair, and she tended it
 well,
When down swung the sound of a far-off bell.
She sighed, she looked up through the clear
 green sea;
She said, "I must go, for my kinsfolk pray
In the little gray church on the shore to-day.
'Twill be Easter-time in the world — ah me!
And I lose my poor soul,¹ merman! here with
 thee."

I said, "Go up, dear heart, through the waves;

Say thy prayer, and come back to the kind sea-
caves!"

She smiled, she went up through the surf in the
bay.

Children dear, was it yesterday?

Children dear, were we long alone?

"The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan;
Long prayers," I said, "in the world they
say;

Come!" I said; and we rose through the surf
in the bay.

We went up the beach, by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-walled
town;

Through the narrow paved streets, where all
was still,

To the little gray church on the windy hill.

From the church came a murmur of folk at
their prayers,

But we stood without in the cold blowing
airs.

We climbed on the graves, on the stones worn
with rains,

And we gazed up the aisle through the small
 leaded panes.

She sate by the pillar; we saw her clear:
"Margaret, hist! come quick, we are here!
Dear heart," I said, "we are long alone;
The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan."
But, ah! she gave me never a look,
For her eyes were sealed to the Holy Book.
Loud prays the priest; shut stands the door.
Come away, children, call no more!
Come away, come down, call no more!

Down, down, down!
Down to the depths of the sea!
She sits at her wheel in the humming town,
Singing most joyfully.
Hark what she sings: "O joy, O joy,
For the humming street, and the child with its
 toy!
For the priest, and the bell, and the holy
 well;
For the wheel where I spun,
And the blessed light of the sun!"
And so she sings her fill,

Singing most joyfully,
Till the spindle drops from her hand,
And the whizzing wheel stands still.
She steals to the window, and looks at the
 sand,
And over the sand at the sea;
And her eyes are set in a stare;
And anon there breaks a sigh,
And anon there drops a tear,
From a sorrow-clouded eye,
And a heart sorrow-laden,
A long, long sigh,
For the cold strange eyes of a little mer-
 maiden,
And the gleam of her golden hair.

Come away, away, children;
Come, children, come down!
The hoarse wind blows colder;
Lights shine in the town.
She will start from her slumber
When gusts shake the door:
She will hear the winds howling
Will hear the waves roar.

We shall see, while above us
The waves roar and whirl,
A ceiling of amber,
A pavement of pearl.
Singing, "Here came a mortal,
But faithless was she!
And alone dwell forever
The kings of the sea."

But, children, at midnight,¹
When soft the winds blow,
When clear falls the moonlight,
When the spring-tides ² are low;
When sweet airs come seaward
From heaths starred with broom,³
And high rocks throw mildly
On the blanched sands a gloom;
Up the still, glistening beaches,
Up the creeks we will hie,
Over banks of bright seaweed
The ebb-tide leaves dry.
We will gaze, from the sand-hills,
At the white sleeping town;
At the church on the hill-side,

And then come back down,
Singing, "There dwells a loved one,
But cruel is she!
She left lonely forever
The kings of the sea."

NOTES

SOHRAB AND RUSTUM

19, 1. And: This form of opening indicates the episodical character of the poem.

2. Oxus: The classical name of the great river now called Amoo Daria. It was the scene of many important events in ancient history. Consult Classical Dictionary and Encyclopedia Britannica.

3. Sohrab (*sō'rāb*): Note the effect of the repetition.

4. Suggest similar repetitions of *and* in the Scriptures.

5. Peran-Wisa (*pē'rān we'sā*): The commander of King Afrasiab's (*af-rā'sī-āb*) army.

6. Pamere (*pä-meer'*): Usually written *Pamir*; an elevated steppe or plateau in which the Oxus has its source, — a part of the great Himalayan plateau.

20, 1. He slept light: So Shakespeare says, in *Romeo and Juliet*, II, 3:

"Care keeps his watch in every old man's eye,
And where care lodges sleep will never lie."

21, 1. Samarcand (*sām-ar-kānd'*): The ancient *Marcanda*, destroyed by Alexander; later the great conqueror Timur's capital. See map of Asia.

2. Ader-baijan (*äd'er-bī'yān*): A northern province of Persia.

3. I seek . . . son: What effect is produced by the repetitions in this sentence?

4. Rustum (*rōōs'tum*): This celebrated Persian hero is

supposed to have lived about 600 years B.C. His romantic life, a mixture of fact and fiction, is the favorite theme of Persian poets. Some believe that he was a commander under Cyrus the Great. The name is variously spelled *Roostam*, *Roostem*, *Rostem*, *Roustem*, etc.

5. **Common fight:** General fight, in which all are engaged.

22, 1. **Seistan** (*se-is-tän'*): Also *Sistan*. A province and lake in Afghanistan.

2. **Zal** (*zäl*): He was distinguished in Persian legend as a hero, but mainly as the father of Rustum.

3. **Whether that . . . Or in:** Either because . . . Or because of.

23, 1. **Ravening:** Obtaining prey by violence, like animals. So in *Ezekiel* xxii, 25: "like a roaring lion ravening the prey."

2. **Kara-kul** (*kä'rä-kool*): A famous pasturage for sheep in Bokhara.

3. **Haman** (*hä'man*): In the original poem he aids in deceiving Sohrab as to his father's presence in the Persian army.

24, 1. **Casbin:** Also *Kasvin*; a city of Persia, once the seat of royalty. Near it, to the north, are the Elburz (*el'boorz*) mountains.

2. **Frore:** Frozen, frosty. A. S., *froren*, from *freosan*, to freeze.

3. **Khiva** (*ke'vä*): An important province, or khanate, of Turkestan. Its capital is *Khiva*.

4. **Milk of mares:** This intoxicating liquor, used by the Tartars, is called *koumiss*. The name is now applied to a somewhat similar preparation of milk for invalids.

5. **Toorkmuns:** The Toorkmuns, or Turkomans, are Tartars inhabiting the steppe east of the Caspian and south of the Oxus.

6. **Attruck:** Also *Atrak*; a river emptying into the Caspian Sea.

7. **A more doubtful service owned:** They did not acknowl-

edge obedience to King Afrasiab, and therefore formed an uncertain part of the army.

8. **Ferghana** (*fer-ghä'nä*): A province of Turkestan, in which are the head-waters of the river Jaxartes, (*jax-ar'teez*), the modern Sihon, or Syr Daria.

9. **Kipchak**: A name once applied to a large region bordering the Caspian Sea on the north.

25, 1. **Kalmucks**: Or *Calmucks*; a nomadic race, inhabiting various parts of the Russian and Chinese empires. They live in "conical felt tents, set up in regular lines like the streets of a town. Their wealth consists entirely in small but high-spirited horses, excellent cattle, and broad-tailed, rough-fleeced sheep."

2. **Kuzzaks** (*kooz'zaks*). The modern Cossacks, a wandering Russian tribe.

3. **Kirghizzes** (*k'ir'ghī-zeez*): A fierce Mongolian tribe from the high mountainous regions.

4. **Khorassan** (*ko-räs-sän'*): "The land of the Sun"; a northeastern province of Persia. *Ilyats* (*il'i-äts*), a word meaning *tribes*, is applied collectively to the Tartar tribes of this province.

26, 1. **Corn**: Used in the European sense of *grain*, as wheat, barley, etc.

2. **Cabool** (*kä-bool'*): Also *Cabul* and *Kabul*; the capital of Afghanistan.

3. **Indian Caucasus**: The same as the Hindoo Koosh mountains, between Afghanistan and Turkestan.

4. **Choked by the air**: Explain the conditions that produce this effect. Suggest any Alpine experiences or adventures that justify the description contained in this fine simile, page 26, lines 7 to 16.

5. **Gudurz** (*goo'doorz*); **Zorrah** (*zo-är'räh*); **Feraburz** (*fe'rä-boorz*).

28, 1. **Sate**: Obsolete form of *sat*.

2. **Falcon**: Falconry, or the sport of using falcons and hawks in hunting, has been practiced in the East from the

most ancient times. It was known in China 2000 years B.C. According to Layard, "a falconer, bearing a hawk on his wrist" was found represented in the bas-reliefs of Nineveh.

3. Those who are familiar with Homer's *Iliad* will find many suggestive similarities in Arnold's poem, notably in the simple and direct language, in the fine similes, and in some of the incidents. This appeal to Rustum recalls the appeal to the "implacable Achilles" in the *Iliad*, book ix. The poem is an evidence of Arnold's splendid classical culture and of his ability to make English verses truly Homeric in quality.

4. **Iran's chiefs:** Persia is called *Iran* by the Persians themselves. According to the Shah-Namah, there were two brothers, Iran and Tur, from whom sprang the Iranians and Turanians.

5. **Go to:** An old phrase of exhortation, often contemptuous, common in the Scriptures and in Shakespeare, as in *Twelfth Night*, IV, 1: "Go to, go to, thou art a foolish fellow."

29, 1. **Kai Khosroo** (*kī kos-roo'*): The Persian name of Cyrus the Great. He was the third of the Kaianian dynasty, the founder of which, Kai Kobad, according to legend, was placed upon the throne by Rustum. In the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam (Fitzgerald's translation) we have:

"What have we to do
With Kaikobad the Great, or Kaikhosru?
Let Zal and Rustum thunder as they will."

Arnold has transferred the scene of the poem from the reign of Kai Kaoos, as given in the Shah-Namah, to the more glorious reign of Kai Khosroo.

2. **Helpless girl:** He had been deceived by the mother. See Introduction, and line 23, page 45 to line 5, page 46.

3. **Snow-haired Zal:** He was born with white hair, and this

being regarded as an ill omen by the father, he was exposed upon the mountains to perish; but was miraculously preserved by a prodigious bird and received again by his father. See lines 2-6, page 49.

31, 1. Ruksh (*rooksh*): This horse plays an important part in the story of Rustum (see Introduction). Recall other famous horses of mythical and historical heroes, as the "swift-footed" Xanthus of Achilles, Alexander's Bucephalus, the Cid's Babieca, etc.

2. Dight: Decked, arrayed. From A. S. *dihtan*, to prepare, dress. So in Milton's *L'Allegro*:

"The clouds in thousand liveries *dight*."

3. Bahrein (*bā'rān*): An island in the Persian Gulf, famous for its pearl fisheries.

4. Tale: Number or reckoning. From A. S. *talian* to tell, count. The Israelites in Egypt had to make their "tale of bricks."

33, 1. Tried: The same as *proved*, line 3, page 36.

2. The antithesis here is strengthened by alliteration.

35, 1. Were: Would be.

36, 1. Dread: Inspiring awe, or fear. So "dread sovereign."

37, 1. Unlopped: Not cut and trimmed with an axe. The Cyclops, Polyphemus, used a pine tree as a walking-stick (Virgil's *Aeneid*, bk. iii). The weapon of Hercules was a club.)

2. Hyphasis (*hi-fa'sis*) or **Hydaspes** (*hi-das'peez*): Rivers of Northern India, tributaries of the Indus, the modern Beas and Jhelum.

3. Dark springs: Why "dark springs"?

4. Wrack: Wreck, ruin; A. S. *wræc*.

39, 1. Autumn star: Sirius, the dog-star, is probably referred to, an object of much superstition in both ancient and modern times.

40, 1. Unnatural: It was against nature that father and son should be thus fighting.

41, 1. Shore: Obsolete preterite of *shear*, allowable only in poetry. From A. S. *sceran*, to cut; *scarf*, *scrip*, *share*, *shore*, *shred*, and many other words indicating something *cut off*, are from this root.

42, 1. What is the effect of the repetition of *and*? Compare *Matthew* vii, 27.

44, 1. Glass her: Reflect her image, like a mirror.

45, 1. Bruited up: Circulated, noised abroad.

46, 1, The style: The title, or name.

2. Smitten: Note the appropriateness of the word, to describe the sudden effect of the sun's rays shooting forth from behind a cloud.

3. That old king: The king of Samengan. See Introduction.

47, 1. Of age and looks to be: Of such age and looks that he might be.

48, 1. The seal: In the original it is an onyx amulet, which he was to wear upon his arm. Why did Arnold change the token of recognition?

2. That: So that.

49, 1. Griffin: The marvelous vulture (like the Roc in the Arabian Nights) that rescued and nurtured Zal when cast away by his father.

52, 1. Helmund (*hel'moond*): A river of Afghanistan, flowing through the province of Seistan. Near it is Lake Zirrah (*zīr'rāh*), now little more than a marsh. Wide possessions here had been given to Rustum by the Persian monarchs.

2. Moorghab, Tejend (*te-yend'*), Kohik (*ko-hik'*): Rivers of Turkestan that are gradually lost in the desert.

53, 1. Northern Sir: The Syr Daria, ancient Jaxartes.

2. Grains of yellow silt: Mud or fine soil carried along by the water and finally deposited.

57, 1. Jemshid (*jem'sheed*): An ancient king of Persia, who is supposed to have added to the splendors of Persepolis, the ruins of which are now called Chilminar, the "Forty Pillars."

2. **But the majestic river floated on:** The author begins and ends the poem with the picture of the smooth-flowing river, thus giving it a beautiful artistic setting. The sublime tranquillity of nature is undisturbed by human suffering and tragedy. Nothing of its kind in modern poetry is finer than this conclusion.

3. **Orgunjè (or'goon-je):** A village on the Oxus, below Khiva.

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

59. The mermaid myth is common to the Celtic people of the British Isles, and under various names is found in the folk lore of Germany and Scandinavia. In Cornwall the mermen and mermaids are called "merry men" and "merry maids." The belief in the frequent union of these sea-creatures with mortals was so well established in the Middle Ages that great families sometimes traced their ancestry to such unions and placed the figure of a mermaid on their coats of arms. The theme is frequently employed in Danish ballads, as in *Agnete and the Merman*, a direct antecedent of *The Forsaken Merman*. Arnold uses it again, but not so happily, in *The Neckan*. Variations of the theme are found in Fouqué's *Undine*, the story of *Melusina*, in S. Baring-Gould's *Myths of the Middle Ages*, Grimm's *The Golden Mermaid*, and Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Sea-Maid*.

This graceful romantic poem, made from the material of pure and tender imagination, is an exception to the general austerity and classic formalism of Arnold's verse; and its melody, though not perfect, is more free and sweet than his singing voice could usually command. In spite of occasional dissonance and an over-elaborate simplicity, "it is a great poem," says Professor Saintsbury, "one by itself, one which finds and keeps its own place in the foreordained gallery or museum, with which every true lover of poetry is provided, though he inherits it by degrees. No one, I suppose, will

deny its pathos; I should be sorry for any one who fails to perceive its beauty."

59, 1. Wild white horses: This fancy forms the substance of Kipling's poem, the *White Horses*.

61, 1. Lose my poor soul: Naturally the church regarded these supposed alliances with superstitious horror, as much worse than ordinary paganism, and pronounced its ban upon them accordingly.

65, 1. At midnight, etc.: In this passage the poet makes a charming adaptation of the belief that evil spirits of all kinds were permitted to wander on earth between midnight and cock-crow. The ghost, in *Hamlet*, appeared "jump at the dead hour" of midnight. These dwellers in darkness may visit the sleeping town, but "the church on the hill-side" indicates their immutable exile from among the children of light.

2. Spring tides: The highest tides, occurring at new and full moon, opposed to neap tides. When the moon is full, the high spring tide will be at moon-rise and the low at midnight.

3. Broom: A shrubby plant with bright yellow flowers that grows in profusion, in connection with the pretty bell-heather, on the great heaths of southwest England; the same as the French *plante genêt*, whence *Plantagenet*, the broom being the badge of this royal family.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

FORM

1. Relate the story briefly, giving the events of the action, without explanations from the introduction.

2. Is the story complete in itself? Why does the author call it an "Episode"?

3. Explain the abrupt beginning of the poem.

4. Is action the chief element of the poem, or description, or reflection?

5. What is the metre of the poem?

6. Secure a clear definition of an epic poem and note how far this poem meets the requirements of the definition.

7. Compare it with other short epic poems, such as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.

8. There are many Homeric features in the poem, the single combat, the supernatural accompaniments, Rostum camping apart in resentful mood, the similes, and the long speeches. Compare with the *Iliad* in these details.

9. By what beautiful device does the poet give definite limits of time to the action?

10. Could the poem be put into dramatic form and presented upon the stage? What would be gained and lost by such change of form?

STYLE

11. Note the character of the language used, simple, clear, forceful words in straightforward expression. Compare with *Paradise Lost* in this respect.

12. From what source did Matthew Arnold derive this

severe simplicity of style? Is it characteristic of his other works?

13. Make a careful study of the Homeric similes. Does each one present a vivid picture? Do they add to the interest of the poem, or do they detract from the interest by interrupting the progress of the action? Are they too numerous?

14. You will note the frequent repetition of phrases. What is the poet's purpose in these repetitions?

15. Study the peculiar repetition of *and*, justifying each instance if possible.

16. Select two or three passages, outside the similes, that show a skilful use of a few words to present a complete picture.

17. The author says, in his essay "On Translating Homer," that epic poetry must be written in the "grand style." Is this poem in the "grand style"? Look up this matter in the essay.

MORAL CONTENT

18. To what extent is the love of fame a fundamental element in the action of the poem?

19. What was Sohrab's motive for fighting? What was Rustum's motive?

20. Where does the responsibility for the final tragedy lie?

21. The ideal hero of an epic poem must possess noble qualities. Is Sohrab such a hero? Is Rustum? Define to yourself clearly the personal qualities of each.

22. Find at the beginning of the poem a hint of what is to occur, a key-note that sounds the sad ending.

23. Rustum's dramatic exclamation "Rustum" marks the climax of the action. Did he intend to reveal himself by this cry? What was its effect upon Sohrab?

24. At what point is the pathos of the last scene deepest?

25. Are the last lines, descriptive of the river, intended to be symbolical of human life?

26. What is the effect of the story upon you as you finish it?





LORD BYRON

Merrill's English Texts

THE PRISONER OF CHILLON

BY
GEORGE GORDON BYRON

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY JULIAN W. ABERNETHY, PH. D., AUTHOR OF
"AMERICAN LITERATURE," "ENGLISH LITERA-
TURE," AND "CORRECT PRONUNCIATION."



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NEW YORK AND CHICAGO

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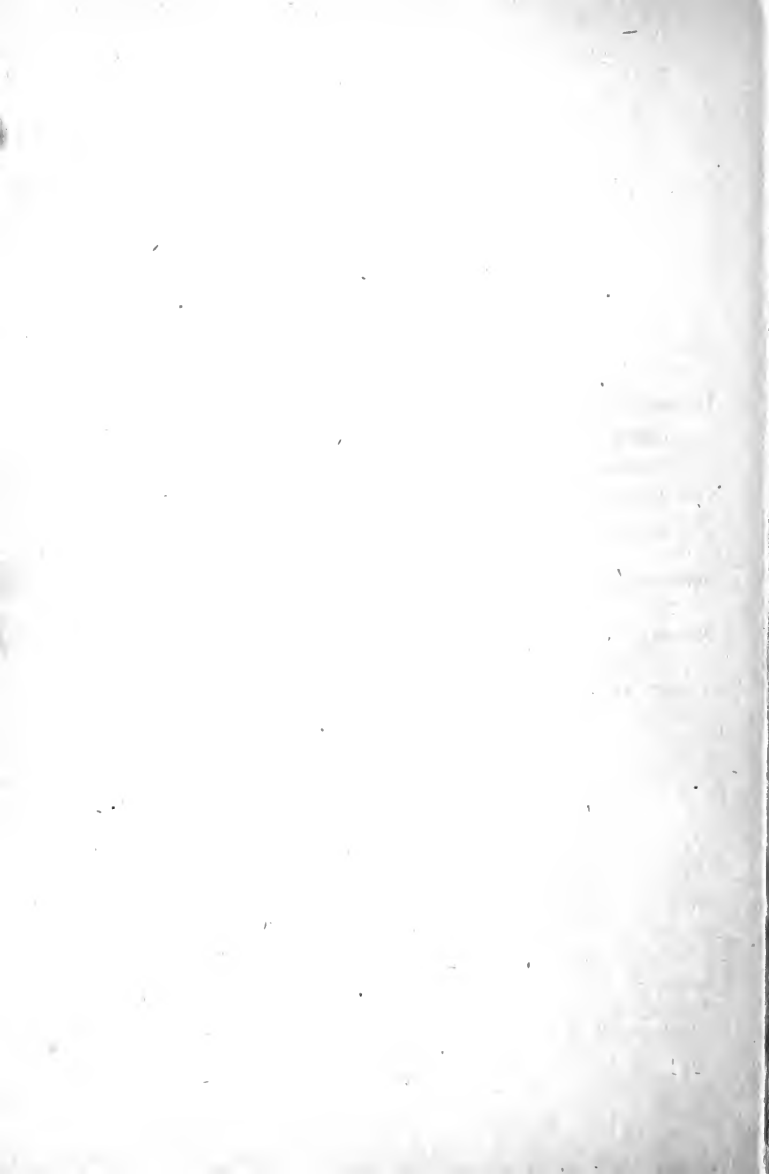
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INTRODUCTION

GEORGE GORDON BYRON

THE story of Byron's life is an unpleasant story to write, to read, or to contemplate. It was a life devoted to selfish gratifications, yet was a miserably unhappy life. "So sad and dark a story," says Macaulay, "is scarcely to be found in any work of fiction." His life was destitute of the noble purposes and lofty enthusiasms with which his contemporaries, Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth, were inspired. His indisputable genius, which flared upon the literary world with meteoric splendor, was attended by an evil influence that fascinated while it repelled. His whole nature was poisoned at the roots. But there was one redeeming act that in the judgment of posterity covers a multitude of his sins. Though he lived ignobly, he died nobly, fighting with sincerity for the cause of liberty, which he had celebrated with much shallow pretense in his poetry. As Landor expressed it:—

Byron was not *all* Byron; one small part
Bore the impression of a human heart.

George Gordon Byron, sixth Lord Byron, was born in London, January 22, 1788. He came from a remote and proud lineage; the name appears in the Domesday Book. His heritage, however, was unfortunate, his immediate ancestors being more distinguished for evil than for good. Newstead Abbey, the family seat, was inherited by the poet from a great uncle who was known as "the wicked

Lord Byron." The poet's father, a captain of the guards, called "mad Jack," married Catherine Gordon, a Scotch heiress, squandered her fortune, and fled from his creditors to the Continent. In *Lara* the poet alludes to this misfortune:—

"Left by his sire, too young such loss to know,
Lord of himself, that heritage of woe."

The mother was proud and passionate, treating her child alternately with tenderness and violence. In one of her fits of rage she threw the fire-poker at him, and at another time called him "a lame brat." This lameness with which he was born, his towering pride, his poverty, and a state of health which required him to live for days together on biscuits and soda-water, were sources of misery through all his life—the principal items in his "heritage of woe."

Byron was educated at Harrow and at Trinity College, Cambridge. At both places he was more celebrated for athletics than for scholarship; he became an expert in boxing, fencing, swimming, and even played cricket, hiring a boy to do the running for him. Said the master of Harrow: "I soon found that a wild mountain colt had been committed to my care." He was always "idle, in mischief, or at play"; but he read voraciously at times, chiefly history, and novels "by the thousand." He attended the university at intervals, as inclination moved him, during three years, and somehow obtained an M. A. in 1808.

While at Cambridge he published, in 1807, *Hours of Idleness*, a volume of juvenile poems of meager merit, which was treated with lofty contempt by the *Edinburgh Review*. The sting of this criticism was painful to the proud young poet. He says that he immediately drank three bottles of claret and began a reply. What he actually did was to take from his desk a satire on contemporary poets, just written, add lines upon the critics, and

publish it as *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. It was an imitation of Pope, without Pope's fine artistic finish. The injustice of many passages was afterward acknowledged by Byron. The success of the poem was immediate and sensational.

In 1809 Byron took his seat in the House of Lords, and thereupon set out for the Continent, where he spent two years in travel. He returned with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the publication of which established his fame as a poet. "I awoke one morning," he says, "and found myself famous." The poem was a new romantic sensation with which the public was highly delighted. The hero was quickly identified with the poet himself. This success was followed by *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, and other similar tales, written with remarkable rapidity, and all with essentially the same hero—himself. Byron was now caught up in a whirlwind of public adoration. "Byronism spread over the land like a fever." His wild, strange poetry, spiced with wickedness, became a fashionable craze. He was the "curled darling" of society. Fashionable young men posed as Childe Harolds and Laras, with open shirt collars, pretending to be men of loneliness and mystery, feeding their souls with melancholy.

The shams of this poetic craze were realized when Byron married Miss Milbanke and was separated from her within a year, under circumstances that have never been fully explained. The marriage was an unfit one in every respect; the wife was a strait-laced Puritan in her morals, the husband was an unprincipled aristocrat, contemptuous of ordinary moral restraints. The event was a volcanic sensation. Society reacted fiercely against Byron, making him out ten times as bad as he really was, and driving him into exile. In 1816 he left England, never to return. Assuming the poem to be sincere, the finest part of his nature was expressed in the poignant lyric,

Fare thee Well, addressed to Lady Byron on his departure, written, it is said, with tears that still mark the manuscript.

The remaining eight years of Byron's life were spent mainly in Italy, often in the companionship of Shelley. His career during these years was a strange alternation of dissipation and devotion to poetry. He wrote profusely, adding two cantos to *Childe Harold*, which contain his best work; several dramas, *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, and others, which with the exception of *Manfred* represent his poorest work; and his final poem, *Don Juan*, which is the fullest presentation of his personal character and poetic genius.

Byron's life was always one of reckless adventure, generally aimed at selfish purposes. In his last adventure he proved that, although he had generally been a sham hero, he was capable of being a real hero. He joined the Greeks in their struggle for liberty, contributed a large sum of money, and for nearly a year served as one of the leaders of the army in the field. Stricken with fever, he died at Missolonghi, in 1824, and was buried in Hucknall Church, near Newstead Abbey.

Byron's character, a singular compound of contradictory qualities, is still a matter of controversy. "Angel or demon?" the Frenchman Lamartine asked. "No genuine good thought was ever revealed by him to mankind," said Carlyle. He was extravagantly generous. To a needy college friend he gave £1000, when he himself was deeply in debt, and slipped a five-hundred-pound note into a breakfast cup for a child to whom he had stood as godfather. His excessive pride was often ludicrous in its manifestations. He envied Beau Brummel, the society fop, and was jealous of Shakespeare's fame. He professed to scorn society and the world, but was a slave and martyr to public opinion. Yet at times he was inspired by beautiful and lofty sentiments. Matthew Arnold finds in him

a "splendid and puissant personality," and Swinburne praises his "excellencies of sincerity and strength." But few can now read his poetry, which is all autobiography, without questioning his sincerity and inclining to accept, as the most charitable disposition of the matter, Macaulay's comment: "How far the character in which he exhibited himself was genuine, and how far theatrical, would probably have puzzled himself to say."

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

The question of Byron's rank and quality as a poet is one of singular disagreement among critics. The exaggerations of praise and censure with which the man was treated have been repeated in discussing the merits and faults of the poet. Arnold ranks him above Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge, and as the equal of Wordsworth. "These two, Wordsworth and Byron, stand, it seems to me, first and preëminent in actual performance, a glorious pair, among the English poets of this century." On the other hand, Theodore Watts-Dunton, with equal authority says: "His rank in the courts of universal criticism still remains, and will always remain, below that of his five great contemporaries." Criticism has not yet reached a final verdict, but there can be no doubt that Byron's glory as a poet is fading before the rising glory of Shelley and Keats.

The first impression of Byron's poetry is that of its brilliancy, its dash and vigor of expression, its opulence of fancy, prodigality of wit, tenderness, eloquence, sublimity—and profanity—that captivate the reader and blind his critical perceptions. But a careful rereading of this poetry reveals its underlying defects—tawdry art, tricks to please the public, repetitions of theme and sentiment, tiresome egotisms, melodramatic posturings. The tinsel is now worn off the fine garments of his swaggering

pirates and desperate adventurers. "In their necklace of Oriental pearls have been discovered beads of glass."

Vigor, impetuosity, and a facile power of expression tend to conceal the limitations upon his greatness. As a matter of fact, says Taine, "no such great poet has had so narrow an imagination; he could not metamorphose himself into another. They are his own sorrows, his own revolts, his own travels, which, hardly transformed and modified, he introduces into his verses. He does not invent, he observes; he does not create, he transcribes."

In respect to the technical qualities of his poetry, Byron was as reckless as he was in respect to the moral qualities. He was an impulsive and clever improviser, rather than a meditating artist. He wrote with impetuous haste, and seldom revised or corrected. "*Lara* I wrote while undressing after coming home from balls and masquerades," he says. Naturally his work is full of crude and careless expression that shows an indifference to finished art. He would even sacrifice grammar for a hasty rhyme. The quality of all his poetry is essentially lyrical, being always an effusion of personal feeling, but he seldom composed a perfect lyric. His finest poetry is descriptive, and his finest descriptions are in *Childe Harold*, vivid and vital in their appeal because they are saturated with personal emotion.

Byron was detached from England in his poetry as he was in his life. The greater part of his poetry, and all of the best of it, was written on the Continent and upon themes drawn from continental scenery, history, and romance. When he wrote of English matters, he wrote not with sympathy but with satiric bitterness. The finest impulses of his genius were stirred by the scenes of classic history. *Childe Harold* is a series of travel sketches, rendered in splendid descriptive verse.

Any final opinion of Byron's true poetic quality must be determined by comparison with Shelley, whom he

long overshadowed. Shelley, "the most truly spiritual of all English poets," says John Morley, "was immeasurably superior to Byron in all the rarer qualities of the specially poetic mind." He has none of the "psychological delicacy, subtle moral traits, opening glimpses into unobserved depths of character," found in Shelley and other great poets. "Byron has composed no piece which may compare with *Prometheus*, or *The Cenci*, any more than Rubens may take his place with Raphael." This is a luminous and convincing comparison. The critic must choose between the powerful, flaming, sensuous art of Rubens and Byron and the delicate, perfected, spiritual art of Raphael and Shelley.

THE PRISONER OF CHILLON

The Castle of Chillon stands at the eastern extremity of Lake Geneva, one mile and a half from Montreux. A little beyond the castle to the south, the river Rhone empties into the lake, and in the same direction rise the snowcapped domes of the Bernese Alps. It is a picturesque and beautiful spot.

In June, 1816, Byron and Shelley, who were then living near each other not far from Geneva, made an excursion by boat around the lake. They visited Castle Chillon and were naturally much impressed by its cavernous dungeons and their historic associations. This is Shelley's account of the visit, given in a letter to his friend Peacock:—

"We passed on to the castle of Chillon, and visited its dungeons and towers. These prisons are excavated below the lake; the principal dungeon is supported by seven columns, whose branching capitals support the roof. Close to the very walls the lake is eight hundred feet deep; iron rings are fastened to these columns, and on them were engraven a multitude of names, partly those of visitors, and partly doubtless of the prisoners, of whom

now no memory remains, and who thus beguiled a solitude which they had long ceased to feel. One date was as ancient as 1670 . . . Close to this long and lofty dungeon was a narrow cell, and beyond it one larger and far more lofty and dark, supported upon two unornamented arches. Across one of these arches was a beam, now black and rotten, on which prisoners were hung in secret. I never saw a monument more terrible of that cold and inhuman tyranny, which it had been the delight of man to exercise over man. . . . The gendarme who conducted us over this castle told us that there was an opening to the lake, by means of a secret spring connected with which the whole dungeon might be filled with water before the prisoners could possibly escape."

The travelers were delayed by rain two days at Ouchy, and there Byron wrote *The Prisoner of Chillon*. The poem at first bore the subtitle, "A Fable," indicating apparently the poet's purpose to make a symbolic presentation of religious persecution. The facts of the poem are widely at variance with history. Of the real Bonivard, Byron had only a guide-book knowledge; but, fact or fiction, the story was enough to inflame his passion for liberty. In a notice prefixed to the poem he said: "When this poem was composed, I was not sufficiently aware of the history of Bonivard, or I should have endeavored to dignify the subject by an attempt to celebrate his courage and his virtues."

The real François Bonivard was born in Seyssel, Switzerland, in 1493, and died in Geneva in 1570. His childhood was spent in the monastery of St. Victor, near Geneva, of which his uncle was prior. He was a student at the universities of Turin, Freiburg, and Strasburg, and in the manner of students of that age spent more time in riotous pleasures than in study. On the death of his uncle he inherited the priory of St. Victor, but had the conscience to refuse to take orders. He now took up his

residence in Geneva, and joined a little band of patriots in their effort to throw off the yoke of the Duke of Savoy. He also had his own private quarrel with the Duke over matters connected with his monastery. In 1518, the doctrines of the Reformation began to spread in Geneva, and Bonivard, although prior of St. Victor, zealously joined the predecessors of Calvin in their reform movement. But he did not reform himself and was several times reproved by the clergy for his "levity, gluttony," and other vices. After being forced by the Duke to give up his monastery, he was treacherously seized and imprisoned, but was released through the efforts of the Bishop of Geneva, who had a warm place in his heart for "jolly François." In 1530 he set out to visit his dying mother at Seyssel, having obtained a safe conduct for the journey; but snares were laid for him by the Duke's men, and he was seized and placed in Castle Chillon. At first he was comfortably lodged, but one day the Duke visited him and was treated with humorous disrespect. "I thought," says Bonivard, "that as I was already in prison and not too well treated I could allow myself the joy of having a little fun; but I paid dearly for it, as I was taken down two stories below into a damp locality where for six years I suffered no end of discomforts." In 1536 he was released by the Bernese, who invaded the Pays de Vaud, and carried him in triumph to Geneva. The city gave him a house and a public office for his support, but imposed the condition that "he should live according to the laws of decency and honesty," a condition that he did not any too well observe.

The Prisoner of Chillon and Other Poems, published in 1816, was reviewed by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* and by Scott in the *Quarterly*. Jeffrey pronounced the poem "sweet and touching." "Even our admiration is at last swallowed up in a most painful feeling of pity and of wonder. It is impossible to mistake these for fictitious

sorrows, conjured up for the purpose of poetical effect." Scott thus commented on the poem:—"The object of the poem is to consider captivity in the abstract and to mark its effects in gradually chilling the mental powers as it benumbs and freezes the animal frame, until the unfortunate victim becomes, as it were, a part of his dungeon, and identified with his chains. . . . This singular poem is more powerful than pleasing. It is the more disagreeable as affording human hope no anchor to rest upon, and describing the sufferer, though a man of talents and virtues, as altogether inert and powerless under his accumulated sufferings. Yet as a picture, however gloomy the coloring, it may rival any which Lord Byron has drawn; nor is it possible to read it without a sinking of the heart corresponding with that which he describes the victim to have suffered."

"This poem," says Professor Hales, "cannot be pronounced a masterpiece; to say nothing of several lapses and carelessnesses, there is a want of concentration in it; the purpose of the poem is somewhat vacillating. But it is a capital specimen of Byron's vigor and *verve*. The passage in which he tries his power of language to the utmost and displays best how remarkable that power was, is Stanza IX."

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THE PRISONER OF CHILLON

My hair is gray, but not with years,
Nor grew it white ¹
In a single night,
As men's ² have grown from sudden fears:
My limbs are bowed, though not with toil,
But rusted with a vile repose,
For they have been a dungeon's spoil,
And mine has been the fate of those
To whom the goodly earth and air
Are banned, ³ and barred—forbidden fare; ⁴
But this ⁵ was for my father's faith ⁶
I suffered chains and courted death;
That father perished at the stake
For tenets he would not forsake;
And for the same his lineal race
In darkness found a dwelling-place;
We were seven ⁷—who now are one,
Six in youth, and one in age,
Finished as they had begun,
Proud of Persecution's rage;

One ¹ in fire, and two in field,
Their belief with blood have sealed; ²
Dying as their father died,
For the God ³ their foes denied;
Three were in a dungeon ⁴ cast,
Of whom this wreck is left the last.

There are seven pillars of Gothic mould, ⁵
In Chillon's dungeons deep and old,
There are seven columns, massy and gray,
Dim with a dull imprisoned ray,
A sunbeam ⁶ which hath lost its way,
And through the crevice and the cleft
Of the thick wall is fallen and left;
Creeping o'er the floor so damp,
Like a marsh's meteor lamp: ⁷
And in each pillar ⁸ there is a ring,
And in each ring there is a chain;
That iron is a cankering thing,
For in these limbs its teeth remain,
With marks that will not wear away,
Till I have done with this new day, ⁹
Which now is painful to these eyes,
Which have not seen the sun to rise

For years ¹—I cannot count them o'er,
I lost their long and heavy score
When my last brother drooped and died,
And I lay living by his side.

They chained us each to a column stone,²
And we were three—yet, each alone:
We could not move a single pace,
We could not see each other's face,
But with that pale and livid light
That made us strangers in our sight:
And thus together—yet apart,
Fettered in hand, but joined in heart,
'Twas still some solace, in the dearth
Of the pure elements of earth,
To hearken to each other's speech,
And each turn comforter to each
With some new hope, or legend old,
Or song heroically bold;
But even these at length grew cold.
Our voices took a dreary tone,
An echo of the dungeon-stone,
 A grating sound—not full and free
 As they of yore were wont to be:

It might be fancy ¹—but to me
They never sounded like our own.

I was the eldest of the three,
And to uphold and cheer the rest
I ought ² to do—and did—my best
And each did well in his degree.

The youngest, whom my father loved,
Because our mother's brow was given
To him—with eyes as blue as heaven;

For him my soul was sorely moved:
And truly might it be distressed
To see such bird in such a nest;
For he was beautiful as day—

(When day was beautiful to me
As to young eagles, being free)—

A polar ³ day, which will not see
A sunset till its summer's gone,

Its sleepless summer of long light,
The snow-clad offspring of the sun!

And thus he was as pure and bright,
And in his natural spirit gay,
With tears for nought but others' ills,
And then they flowed like mountain rills,

Unless he could assuage the woe
Which he abhorred to view below.¹

The other was as pure of mind,²
But formed to combat with his kind;
Strong in his frame, and of a mood
Which 'gainst the world in war had stood,³
And perished in the foremost rank

With joy;—but not in chains to pine:
His spirit withered with their clank,
I saw it silently decline—

And so perchance in sooth did mine:
But yet I forced it on to cheer
Those relics of a home so dear.
He was a hunter ⁴ of the hills,
Had followed there the deer and wolf;
To him this dungeon was a gulf,
And fettered feet the worst of ills.

Lake Lemman ⁵ lies by Chillon's walls:
A thousand ⁶ feet in depth below
Its massy ⁷ waters meet and flow;
Thus much the fathom-line ⁸ was sent
From Chillon's snow-white battlement,

Which round about the wave enthrals:
A double dungeon wall and wave
Have made—and like a living grave
Below the surface of the lake
The dark vault lies wherein we lay,
We heard it ripple night and day;
 Sounding o'er our heads it knocked;
And I have felt the winter's spray
Wash through the bars when winds were
 high
And wanton ¹ in the happy sky;
 And then the very rock hath rocked,²
 And I have felt it shake, unshocked,
Because I could have smiled to see
The death that would have set me free.

I said my nearer brother pined,
I said his mighty heart declined,
He loathed and put away his food;
It was not that 'twas coarse and rude,
For we were used to hunter's fare,
And for the like had little care:³
The milk drawn from the mountain goat
Was changed for water from the moat,

Our bread was such as captives' tears
Have moistened many a thousand years,
Since man first pent his fellow-men
Like brutes within an iron den;
But what were these to us or him?
These wasted not his heart or limb;
My brother's soul was of that mould
Which in a palace had grown ¹ cold,
Had his free breathing been denied
The range of the steep mountain's side;
But why delay the truth?—he died.
I saw, and could not hold his head,
Nor reach his dying hand—nor dead—
Though hard I strove, but strove in vain,
To rend and gnash my bonds in twain.
He died—and they unlocked his chain,
And scooped for him a shallow grave
Even from the cold earth of our cave.
I begged them, as a boon, to lay
His corse in dust whereon the day
Might shine—it was a foolish thought,
But then within my brain it wrought,
That even in death his freeborn breast
In such a dungeon could not rest.

I might have spared my idle prayer—
They coldly laughed—and laid him there:
The flat and turfless earth above
The being we so much did love;
His empty chain above it leant,
Such murder's fitting monument!

But he,¹ the favorite and the flower,
Most cherished since his natal hour,
His mother's image in fair face,
The infant love of all his race,
His martyred father's dearest thought,
My latest care, for whom I sought
To hoard my life, that his might be
Less wretched now, and one day free;
He, too, who yet had held untired
A spirit natural or inspired—
He, too, was struck, and day by day
Was withered on the stalk away.
Oh God! it is a fearful thing
To see the human soul take wing
In any shape, in any mood:
I've seen it rushing forth in blood,

I've seen it on the breaking ocean
Strive with a swoln convulsive motion,
I've seen the sick and ghastly bed
Of sin delirious with its dread:
But these were horrors—this was woe
Unmixed with such—but sure and slow:
He faded, and so calm and meek,
So softly worn, so sweetly weak,
So tearless, yet so tender—kind,
And grieved for those ¹ he left behind;
With all the while a cheek whose bloom
Was as a mockery of the tomb,
Whose tints as gently sunk away
As a departing rainbow's ray ²—
An eye of most transparent light,
That almost made the dungeon bright,
And not a word of murmur—not
A groan o'er his untimely lot,—
A little talk of better days,
A little hope my own to raise,
For I was sunk in silence—lost
In this last loss, of all the most;
And then the sighs he would suppress
Of fainting nature's feebleness,

More slowly drawn, grew less and less,
I listened, but I could not hear—
I called, for I was wild with fear;
I knew 'twas hopeless, but my dread
Would not be thus admonished;
I called and thought I heard a sound—
I burst my chain with one strong bound,
And rushed to him:—I found him not,
I only stirred in this black spot,
I only lived—*I* only drew
The accursed breath of dungeon-dew; ¹
The last—the sole—the dearest link
Between me and the eternal brink,
Which bound me to my failing race,
Was broken in this fatal place.
One on the earth, and one beneath—
My brothers—both had ceased to breathe:
I took that hand which lay so still,
Alas! my own was full as chill;
I had not strength to stir, or strive,
But felt that I was still alive—
A frantic feeling, when we know
That what we love shall ne'er be so.

I know not why
I could not die,¹
I had no earthly hope but faith,
And that forbade a selfish death.

What next befell me then and there
I know not well—I never knew—
First came the loss of light, and air,
And then of darkness too:
I had no thought, no feeling—none—
Among the stones I stood a stone,
And was, scarce conscious what I wist,
As shrubless crags within the mist;²
For all was blank, and bleak, and gray;
It was not night—it was not day;
It was not even the dungeon-light,
So hateful to my heavy sight,
But vacancy absorbing space,
And fixedness—without a place:
There were no stars—no earth—no time—
No check—no change—no good—no crime—
But silence, and a stirless breath
Which neither was of life nor death;

A sea of stagnant idleness,
Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless!

A light ¹ broke in upon my brain,—
It was the carol of a bird;
It ceased, and then it came again,
The sweetest song ear ever heard,
And mine was thankful till my eyes
Ran over with the glad surprise,
And they that moment could not see
I was the mate of misery;
But then by dull degrees came back
My senses to their wonted track;
I saw the dungeon walls and floor
Close slowly round me as before,
I saw the glimmer of the sun
Creeping as it before had done,
But through the crevice where it came
That bird was perched, as fond and tame,
And tamer than upon the tree;
A lovely bird with azure wings,
And song that said a thousand things,
And seemed to say them all for me!

I never saw its like before,
I ne'er shall see its likeness more:
It seemed like me to want a mate,
But was not half so desolate,
And it was come to love me when
None lived to love me so again,
And cheering from my dungeon's brink,
Had brought me back to feel and think.
I know not if it late were free,
Or broke its cage to perch on mine,
But knowing well captivity,
Sweet bird! I could not wish for thine!
Or if it were, in wingèd guise,
A visitant from Paradise;
For—Heaven forgive that thought! the while
Which made me both to weep and smile;
I sometimes deemed that it might be
My brother's soul come down to me;
But then at last away it flew,
And then 'twas mortal well I knew,
For he would never thus have flown,
And left me twice so doubly lone,—
Lone—as the corse within its shroud,
Lone—as a solitary cloud,

A single cloud on a sunny day,
While all the rest of heaven is clear,
A frown upon the atmosphere,
That hath no business to appear
When skies are blue, and earth is gay.

A kind of change came in my fate,
My keepers grew compassionate;
I know not what had made them so,
They were inured to sights of woe,
But so it was:—my broken chain
With links unfastened did remain,
And it was liberty to stride
Along my cell from side to side,
And up and down, and then athwart,
And tread it over every part;
And round the pillars one by one,
Returning where my walk begun,
Avoiding only, as I trod,
My brothers' graves without a sod;
For if I thought with heedless tread,
My step profaned their lowly bed,
My breath came gaspingly and thick,
And my crushed heart fell ¹ blind and sick.

I made a footing in the wall,¹

It was not therefrom to escape,
For I had buried one and all

Who loved me in a human shape;
And the whole earth would henceforth be
A wider prison unto me:
No child—no sire—no kin had I,
No partner in my misery;
I thought of this, and I was glad,
For thought of them had made me mad;
But I was curious to ascend
To my barred windows, and to bend
Once more, upon the mountains high,
The quiet of a loving eye.²

I saw them—and they were the same,
They were not changed like me in frame;
I saw their thousand years of snow
On high—their wide long lake below,
And the blue ³ Rhone in fullest flow;
I heard the torrents ⁴ leap and gush
O'er channelled rock and broken bush;
I saw the white-walled distant town,⁵
And whiter sails go skimming down;

And then there was a little isle,¹
Which in my very face did smile,
The only one in view;
A small green isle, it seemed no more,
Scarce broader than my dungeon floor,
But in it there were three tall trees,
And o'er it blew the mountain breeze,
And by it there were waters flowing,
And on it there were young flowers grow-
ing,

Of gentle breath and hue.

The fish swam by the castle wall,
And they seemed joyous each and all;
The eagle rode the rising blast,
Methought he never flew so fast
As then to me he seemed to fly,
And then new tears came in my eye,
And I felt troubled—and would fain
I had not left my recent chain;
And when I did descend again,
The darkness of my dim abode
Fell on me as a heavy load;
It was as is a new-dug grave,
Closing o'er one we sought to save,—

And yet my glance, too much oppressed,
Had almost need of such a rest.
It might be months, or years, or days,
 I kept no count—I took no note,
I had no hope my eyes to raise,
 And clear them of their dreary mote;
At last men came to set me free,
 I asked not why, and recked not where,
It was at length the same to me,
Fettered or fetterless to be,
 I learned to love despair.
And thus when they appeared at last,
And all my bonds aside were cast,
These heavy walls ¹ to me had grown
A hermitage—and all my own!
And half I felt as they were come ²
To tear me from a second home:
With spiders I had friendship made,
And watched them in their sullen trade,³
Had seen the mice by moonlight play,
And why should I feel less than they?
We were all inmates of one place,
And I, the monarch of each race,

Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell!
In quiet we had learned to dwell; ¹
My very chains and I grew friends,
So much a long communion tends
To make us what we are:—even I
Regained my freedom with a sigh.²

SONNET ON CHILLON

ETERNAL Spirit of the chainless Mind!

Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art;

For there thy habitation is the heart—

The heart which love of thee alone can bind;

And when thy sons to fetters are consigned—

To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless
gloom,

Their country conquers with their martyr-
dom,

And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.

Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,

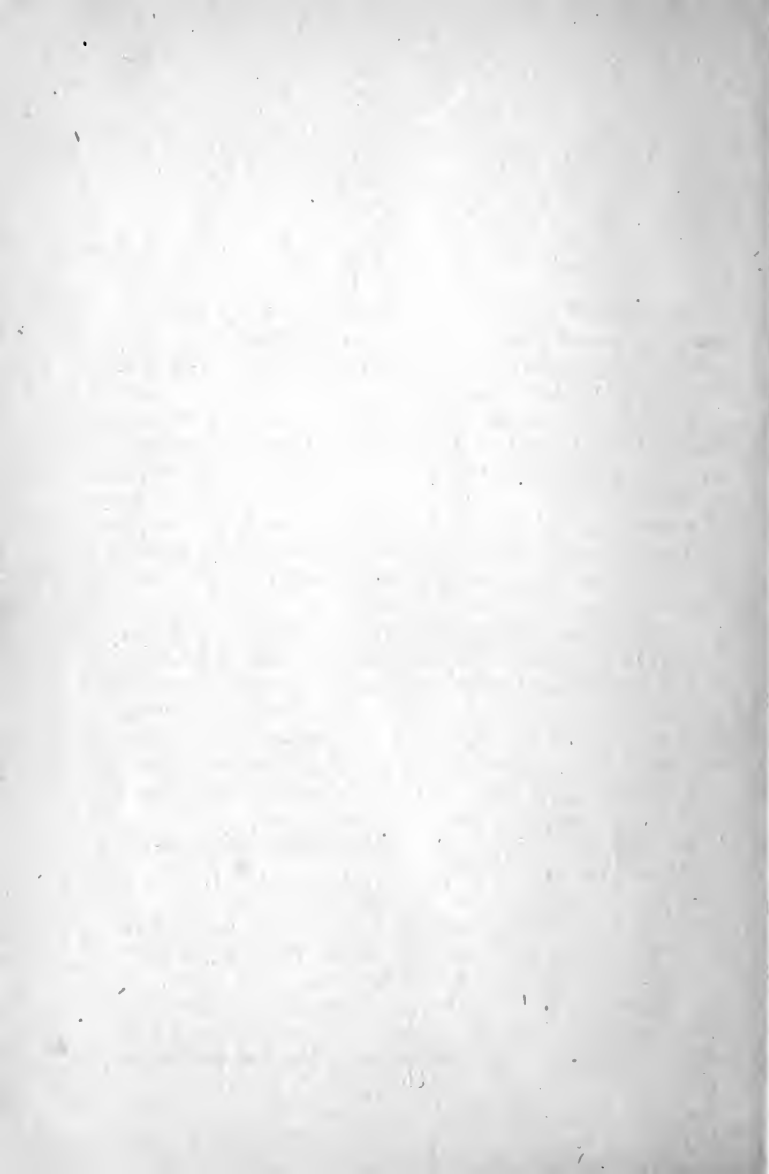
And thy sad floor an altar—for 'twas trod,

Until his very steps have left a trace

Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,

By Bonivard!—May none those marks efface!

For they appeal from tyranny to God.



NOTES

17, 1. White: Many instances are recorded of hair turned white by terror, fear, or intense grief. When Marie Antionette, Queen of France, came from prison to the guillotine, her hair was nearly white.

2. Men's have grown: Here Byron's grammar is made to accommodate the sense. We cannot say *men's hairs*, but can get his meaning by saying *the hair of men* (in many well known cases) *has grown*.

3. Banned: The *New English Dictionary* gives this as the first instance of the use of the verb "to ban" in the sense of *prohibit*. Usually it means *to curse*, *to anathematize*, in a religious sense.

4. Fare: Here it is *passage*; more usually, the *price of passage*.

5. This: Is there any advantage here in the use of *this* for *it*?

6. For my father's faith: Bonivard's imprisonment was for political rather than religious reasons. Such martyrdoms, however, were usually religious, and, moreover, this explanation naturally appealed to the prejudices of Byron and Shelley.

7. We were seven: The real Bonivard had only two brothers. Neither was ever imprisoned with him.

18, 1. One in fire, etc.: That is, one in the fire of martyrdom, and two in the field of battle.

2. Have sealed: Examine the tense here.

3. The God their foes denied: Each party in the religious wars had its own conception of God, to which it held tenaciously—willing even to die for its opinion.

4. Dungeon: The dungeon was originally the principal tower of a castle, used as a lookout and commanding a wide view. The name was finally applied to the dark and barred

room at the bottom of the tower, in which prisoners were confined. The dungeon of Chillon, however, is a fairly spacious and well-lighted room, as it appears to-day.

5. **Seven pillars of gothic mould:** Note the definiteness of each object mentioned in this stanza, as if pointed out by a guide, and each object described by some simple and strong adjective. There are just seven columns, each with a ring, each ring with a chain, and the chains are rust-covered and so have "teeth" that are a "cankering thing." Besides, the number seven is a sacred number. At the end of the stanza this minute definiteness is changed for vagueness in order to enlarge the sense of time. The effect of this introductory description is to produce a shiver, as if one were entering a cold damp crypt, where only dead things are visible. The meter is smooth and subdued, as one's voice is naturally subdued in such places.

6. **A sunbeam:** The effect of the sunbeams from the narrow slit-like windows, at different hours of the day, as they reach into the remoter parts of the dungeon, is one of the notable sights of the castle. Says the guide-book:—"The sun's light passes by reflection from the surface of the lake up to the roof, transmitting partly also the blue color of the water." "During the afternoon the wall assumes a much deeper and warmer coloring, and the blue transparency of the morning disappears; but at eventide, after the sun has set behind the Jura, the scene changes to the deep glow of fire."

7. **Marsh's meteor lamp:** Will-o'-the-wisp, *ignis fatuus*, Jack o' Lantern and Friar Rush are different names for the strange light seen over marshy places, by which the devil was supposed to lead people astray. Byron has, in *Manfred*, "the wisp on the morass," and Scott has, in *Marmion IV*, 1, "Lantern led by Friar Rush."

8. **In each pillar, etc.:** Byron is not exact—probably did not intend to be. Only one pillar now bears its ring, and near this pillar the pavement is worn away by the feet of Bonivard, the traveler is told. On one of the pillars Byron's name may

be seen, among hundreds of others, including those of Victor Hugo and George Sand.

9. **This new day:** Bonivard has just been released, and is beginning life anew.

19, 1. **For years, etc.:** He had been imprisoned only six years. The intensity of the horror is increased by lengthening the period indefinitely.

2. **Column stone:** Not a very felicitous substitute for a *column of stone*.

20, 1. **It might be fancy:** The "fancy" is based on fact, as those will testify who have visited deep caverns. The poet, of course, is aiming at a weird or supernatural effect.

2. **Ought:** *Ought* is really the past tense of the verb *owe*, but here means, it was my duty to do.

3. **Polar day:** A day half a year long; that is, there is but one day and one night in the year at the poles.

21, 1. **Below:** What does Byron mean by this word?

2. **Pure of mind:** The eldest brother dwells upon the qualities of his two brothers, as he had done so long in the dungeon, in the silent company of their dead bodies. In this stanza he shows why the "nearer brother" died first. He was a hunter, with the heart of a soldier, who could endure any hardship better than the loss of his freedom. His soul was one of action, and could not be sustained by thought and faith, like the soul of the eldest brother.

3. **Had stood:** Would have stood. In line 8, page 21 the subject, *mood*, is understood.

4. **A hunter:** The imprisoned hunter thinks of himself as of one who has fallen into a chasm, while hunting, from which he cannot climb out with fettered feet. The "worst of ills" under such circumstances.

5. **Lake Leman:** The original Roman name (*Lemanus*) of Lake Geneva. The lake is forty-five miles long, varying in breadth from one and a half to nine miles. It is a beautiful sheet of water. In *Childe Harold* Byron says:

Lake Leman woos me with its crystal face.

6. **A thousand feet:** The guide-books say eight hundred. Either figure is sufficiently marvelous. As the visitor stands in the dungeon, he hears the heavy waves beating constantly against the walls of the castle.

7. **Massy:** Here (as in line 9, page 18) large in bulk and strength. This form was always used by Shakespeare and Milton instead of *massive*. In *Il Penseroso* Gothic pillars are described as *massy-proof*.

8. **Fathom-line:** The line used on shipboard for sounding, or measuring the depth of water. Seamen measure by fathoms (six feet).

22, 1. **Wanton:** Here an adjective, meaning wild, unruly, unrestrained, referring to winds. The line suggests contrast with the unhappy conditions within the barred windows.

2. **Rock hath rocked:** The alliteration in these two lines is a rather ludicrous break in the smooth solemnity of the prisoner's narrative. Either Bonivard or Byron must have been lacking in the sense of humor at the moment.

3. **Had little care:** That is, they had little objection to coarse food. It was in mind, not in body, that they suffered.

23, 1. **Had grown:** Would have grown cold.

24, 1. **But he:** Jeffrey said, in his review of the poem: "The gentle decay and gradual extinction of the youngest life is the most beautiful passage in the poem."

25, 1. **Those he left behind:** J. W. Hales says of this line: "There is much delicacy in this plural. By such a fanciful multiplying of the survivors, the elder brother prevents self-intrusion; himself and his loneliness are, as it were, kept out of sight, and forgotten. There is a not unlike sensitiveness in the Scotch phrase 'them that's awa' of some single lost one. The grief is softened by vagueness."

2. **Departing rainbow's ray:** This effective simile has become a familiar quotation. It not only describes most beautifully the gradual fading away of the boy's life, but summarizes and symbolizes the extreme tenderness of the whole stanza, which is Byron's masterpiece of pathos. The length of this

stanza is noteworthy. It is almost a complete tragedy—which reaches its climax at line 15, page 26.

26, 1. Dungeon-dew: The moist air of the dungeon.

27, 1. Die: Similarly in *The Ancient Mariner*, Part IV, 262: "And yet I could not die."

2. Mist: Byron had seen such pictures in Scotland, and in Switzerland, where the barrenness and desolation on the mountain tops add to the gloom of the mist.

28, 1. A light: The prisoner is awakened from his torpor and restored to sanity by hearing a bird's song, as the Ancient Mariner is restored from a similar condition by watching the playful water-snakes. (*Ancient Mariner*, Pt. IV, 272-291.) This use of the bird's song to restore the prisoner's shattered consciousness is the finest imaginative touch in the poem, seldom if ever surpassed by Byron in his use of nature. The remedial and consoling influences of nature, upon which Wordsworth dwelt so persistently in his poetry, were hardly known to Byron by experience. This passage is as celebrated as the passage in which Shakespeare heals the distracted brain of King Lear by the ministration of gentle music.

30, 1. Fell blind, etc.: This is often incorrectly printed *fell*, etc. The word is used as in the phrase "fell ill."

31, 1. The wall. The visit of the bird has drawn the prisoner's thoughts to outward nature, and stirred his curiosity. He looks upon the familiar and happy scene of nature, and the contrast with his own misery deepens his hopelessness and gloom. Wordsworth would have ended the poem with cheer and hope, drawn from the glimpse of nature's beauty, where Byron ends it with black despair. This particular effect was what would have happened to Byron, rather than what must necessarily happen. In other words, Byron's hero here, as everywhere in his poetry, is sketched from his own mirror.

31, 2. The quiet of a loving eye: "A thoroughly Wordsworthian line," says Hales. There are many such suggestions of Wordsworth's influence in the poem. The reader is also often reminded of Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*.

3. **Blue Rhone:** Byron was thinking of the Rhone as he had seen it rushing through the bridges of Geneva. When it flows into the lake, it is creamy white or grayish in color, like all glacier streams. Shelley noted the facts more accurately: "The turbid waters mixed with those of the lake, but mixed with them unwillingly."

4. **The torrents:** A mountain brook falls down the cliff near the castle.

5. **Distant town:** Villeneuve, one mile and a half away.

32, 1. **A little isle:** Called Ile de Paix, thirty paces long and twenty wide. It still bears the three trees. Byron thus wrote of it: "Between the entrances of the Rhone and Villeneuve, not far from Chillon, is a very small island, the only one I could perceive in my voyage round and over the lake, within its circumference. It contains a few trees (I think not above three), and from its singleness and diminutive size has a peculiar effect upon the eye."

33, 1. **These heavy walls:** It is interesting to associate with these lines the famous passage from Lovelace's lyric, *To Althea from prison*:

Stone walls do not a prison make
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.

2. **As they were come:** As if they were come.

3. **Trade:** Habitual occupation.

34, 1. **To dwell:** After this line followed in the original MS. two tentative lines of a red republican character, which Byron wisely cut out:

Nor slew I of my subjects one—
What sovereign { hath so little
 { yet so much hath } done?

2. **A sigh:** Tamed birds will return to the cage when set free after long terms of imprisonment; prisoners will return to the prison, when liberated, being like lost children in an

unfamiliar world. So far Byron's conclusion is justified; but the last line is hardly correct. Where there is consciousness of freedom, there is no sigh of regret.

SONNET ON CHILLON

Watts-Dunton declared this sonnet to be Byron's highest reach in serious poetry, but raised the query at once, whether in reality he loved liberty. How could the sentiment of this sound be his own, since he was an excessive admirer of Napoleon, the tyrant who trampled down the liberties of all Europe? It is a hard question, to be answered only in accordance with one's view of Byron's character.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

1. Give an outline of the main facts of Byron's life.
2. His relations with his mother (consult biographies).
3. Give illustrations (from biographies) of Byron's pride.
4. Make a clear statement of the conflicting opinions (1) upon Byron's personal character and (2) upon his value as a poet.
5. Compare Byron with Shelley, (1) in respect to personal character, (2) in respect to the qualities of their poetry.
6. What appears to be Byron's purpose in *The Prisoner of Chillon*?
7. Explain Byron's probable thought in calling the poem "a fable."
8. Compare the two with the historic Bonivard.
9. What effect is produced on the mind by this poem?
10. Do the pathos and tenderness in the poem seem genuine?
11. Is the poem a product of imagination or of observation? Discuss Taine's criticism.
12. What is meant by the "pure elements of earth," in line 14, page 19?
13. Discuss the description of a polar day, lines 16-19, page 20. Is the simile a good one?
14. Explain lines 4, 5, page 27.
15. Select the finest simile in the poem.
16. Explain the improvement made by Byron in line 17, page 31. "I saw their thousand years of snow."
17. Point out some of the "lapses and carelessness" to which Professor Hales refers.
18. Is there any passage in the poem that shows a delicate appreciation of nature?

19. Find similarities between this poem and *The Ancient Mariner*.

20. Describe the meter of the poem. What other poems by Byron are written in this meter? What poets had used it before Byron? Is it a good meter for narrative poems?

21. Compare this poem with *Christobel*, especially, with reference to the meter, and note whether Byron was influenced by Coleridge. (*Christobel* was published the same year, 1816, but Byron had read the poem in MS. and warmly praised it in a letter to his publisher).



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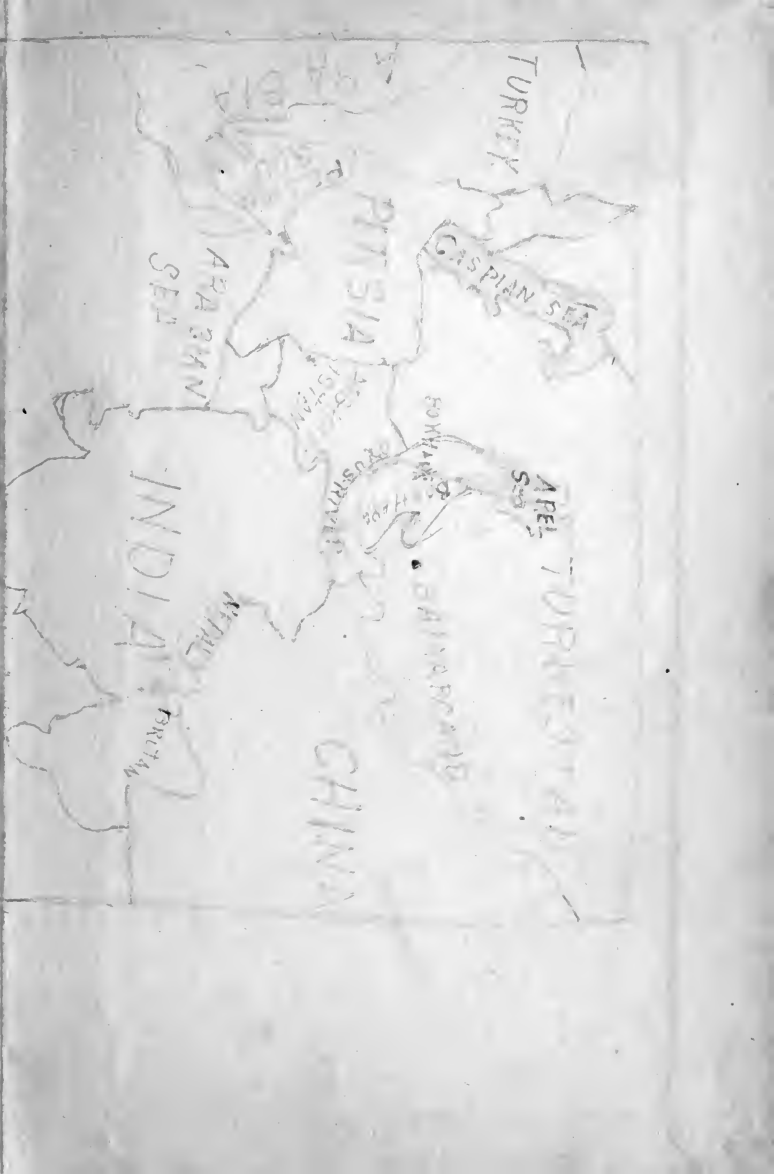






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